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Scottish Bird News

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Donald Watson - an appreciation of his life

Hen Harriers at a winter roost in Galloway (grateful acknowledgement to owner Roger Clarke)

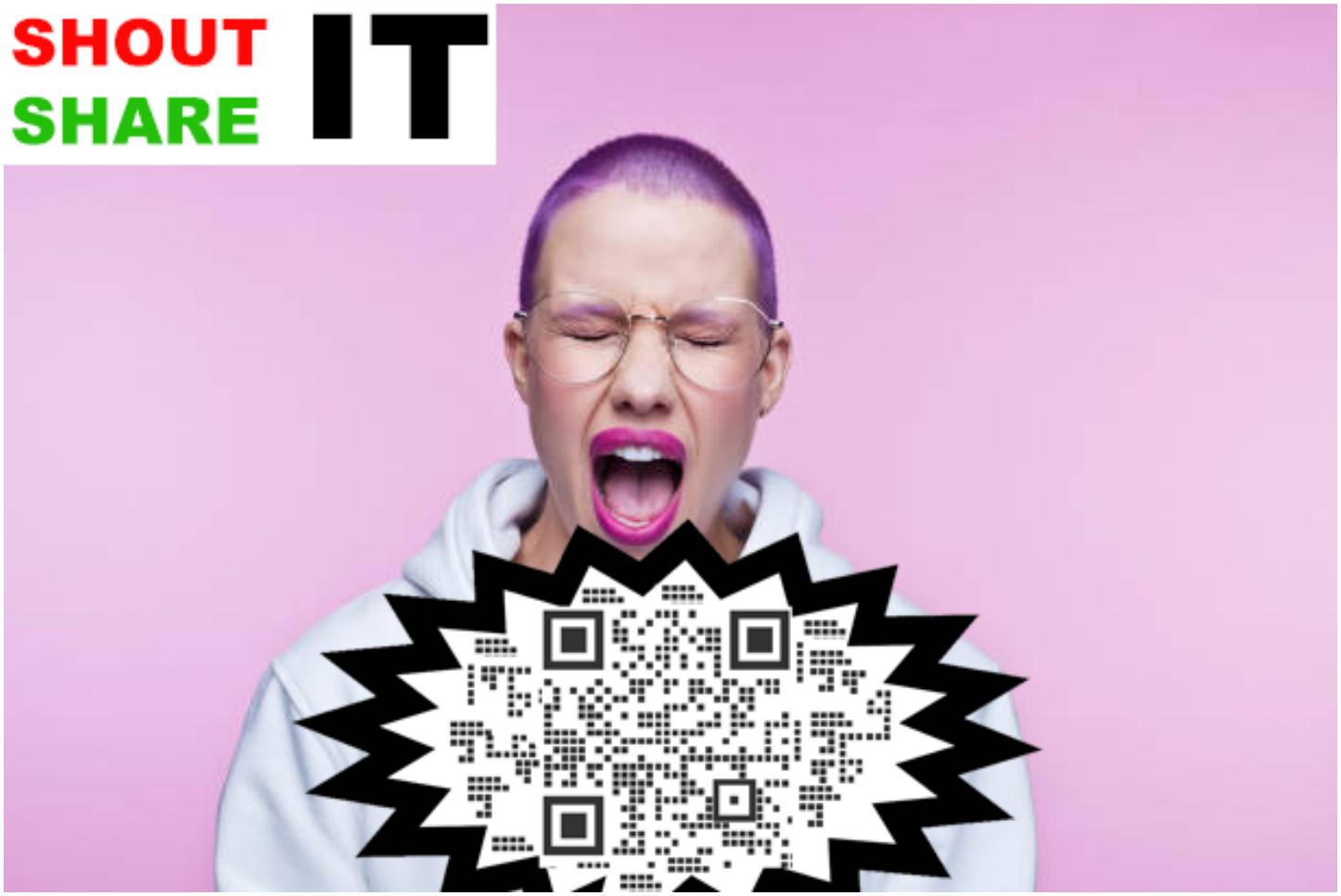
Chris Rollie writes this account of the life of Donald Watson (28th June 1918–7th November 2005).

I travel quite widely in the UK through my own work with the RSPB, and everywhere I meet people who have a fondness for Donald and his work, including very many who have never met him. The mere mention of St John's Town of Dalry in a talk or conversation is enough for them to recall the name Donald Watson. Very many of them do know him, of course, and like us know how kind, supportive and encouraging he was to us all.

Scottish ornithology loses an elder statesman and master craftsman; Galloway loses its own Donald Watson.

Donald Watson was born at Cranleigh in Surrey on 28 June 1918 of a Scots father and an English mother. He first began to draw birds before he was five years old and copied illustrations by Archibald Thorburn, the great wildlife artist of late Victorian and Edwardian times. Indeed in 1930, Thorburn, a near neighbour and by then in his late 60s, invited young Donald to tea and encouraged his early interest, leaving an impression on him that was to remain throughout his life. However, painting was already in his blood, his father's sister (Margaret Stephens) having won a scholarship from Aberdeen to attend the Slade School of Art in London, while on his mother's side his uncle was H.John Pearson, an architect whose paintings were exhibited in the Royal Academy. His older brother Eric too became a most accomplished artist.

Shortly after Donald's father died in 1931, his mother took her three sons to live in Edinburgh, where he attended Edinburgh Academy from 1932 to 1937. It was there that he came under the influence of George Waterston, a former pupil, founder of the Midlothian Ornithologists' Club and giant of Scottish ornithology in the 20th century. Waterston enrolled him in the Midlothian club, of which Donald was the last surviving member, and which developed into the Scottish Ornithologists' Club in 1936, with both becoming founder members. His bird art continued to develop during this period, as did his skill and experience as a birdwatcher. He first visited the Isle of May in 1933, where he met the `good ladies', Misses Baxter and Rintoul, who were just finishing their final visit to `the May.' Fired on by the migration studies of these ladies, though employing somewhat less fatal methods of capture, Donald was to visit the island almost annually for the next fifty years.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In 1937, he won a scholarship to St John's College in Oxford and graduated with an honours degree in Modern History in 1940. His war service began in the Royal Army Medical Corps, but he soon transferred to the Royal Artillery as a second Lieutenant and subsequently made Captain. Following various postings at home, he sailed in 1944 from the Clyde to India to join the 6th Medium Regiment in Bihar. However, after a month in the relative peace of India, his regiment moved east along the coast to take part in the autumn offensive in Arakan, Burma. There Donald was to experience that common sense of purpose and deep camaraderie that was to form such a characteristic bond between countrymen in the face of wartime adversity and horror. Throughout his time in the army, where possible Donald continued to paint and Burma was no exception. Artistically, he was always inspired as much by landscapes as birds, and he found the Burmese varieties of colours and tone, from bright light to deep shade, irresistible. The birds were an exciting and rich mixture of resident birds new to him and familiar migrants from the Palearctic. He enjoyed a lucky break when he found that the GOC, General Christison (a fellow Edinburgh Academical), was a keen and expert ornithologist, who ignored the restlessness of his staff officers to talk at length with Lieutenant Watson about birds. In this way, Donald discovered that there was a network of keen naturalists throughout the British services in India and Burma, and so in his own way he was able to contribute to this pool of information. This was something of a comfort as the fighting became fierce through the mangroves and jungle swamps of Arakan, culminating in the allied landings and capture of Rangoon, abandoned very hastily by the Japanese.

He returned home to Edinburgh in April 1946, where George Waterston soon introduced him to Rev.J.M. McWilliam and Arthur Duncan (later Sir Arthur, Chairman of the Nature Conservancy and Lord Lieutenant of Dumfriesshire). Both men were keen ornithologists and near neighbours at Tynron in Dumfriesshire, and moreover both were instantly taken by Donald's paintings. Arthur Duncan invited the young artist to stay with him at Tynron and undertake an ambitious series of paintings of birds in their habitats. In this tranquil and supportive setting, Donald began honing his skill as a professional artist, trying various techniques and methods, and attempting to emulate his favourite bird artists such as Crawhall, Seaby, Ennion and Thorburn, but always with an eye on the French impressionists, especially Monet, and other landscape masters. Although skilled in many methods, from oils to scraperboard, he settled largely on gouache and watercolour, perfecting a natural manner of painting out of doors in a courageous and open style of great vibrancy that characterised his work in the late 1940s and 50s. Still partly undecided on whether to become primarily either a bird or landscape artist, he made up his mind on discovering the works of Swedish nature artist, Bruno Liljefors; he could be both! Thereafter, Donald said that he was `always happiest in relating birds to their environment', and he was a leader in the genre for several decades, inspiring and encouraging many of the present generation of wildlife artists.

In the spring of 1949, the Edinburgh art dealer, Ronnie Wheatley, gave him a critically acclaimed one-man exhibition. Others followed in London, Glasgow, Newcastle, Oxford, Kirkcudbright, Dumfries and elsewhere. He also exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy, Water Colour Society, Glasgow Institute and Royal Institute, as well as being represented in international exhibitions such as Animals in Art (Toronto, 1975) and Nature in Art (Luxembourg, 1989). In 1950 he married Joan Moore, whom he had first met as a child in Surrey, and in 1951 they moved to settle in St John's Town of Dalry in Galloway, overlooking the Rhinns of Kells, where they were to raise their four children and live happily for the rest of their lives.

Donald's ability to relate wildlife, especially birds, to their landscape was truly magical, with the natural movement and `choreography' of birds in flight captured in his distinctive and evocative style that so impressed art lovers and experienced ornithologists alike. This derived, of course, from his own expert knowledge of his subject, his eye for detail and his special art. Although birds in their landscapes became his trademark, he continued to paint portraits, and in 1962 he began his long series of bird illustrations with the Oxford Book of British Birds (OUP), which involved him painting a total of 96 colour plates, one every week for two years. These included all birds that had been authentically identified in the British Isles up until that time. Somewhat to the alarm of the editor, he dared to paint much landscape into the plates, but the former needn't have worried as the book immediately became a classic and has been reissued in various formats on numerous occasions since. Indeed, Donald was to go on and illustrate over thirty other books, perhaps most notably those in the prestigious Poyser series, where he collaborated with his friends Desmond and Maimie Nethersole-Thompson on Greenshanks (1979) and Waders (1986), and with friend Derek Ratcliffe on The Peregrine Falcon (1980). In 1964, he became a founder member of the Society of Wildlife Artists, which holds annual exhibitions in London, and in 2002

Continues on page 6.

Donald in his studio *(Robin Bryden)*

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Contributions for the next issue of *SBN* should be submitted not later than 9th May 2006 to:

***SBN* Editor, SOC, The Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre, Waterston House, Aberlady, East Lothian EH32 0PY.**

Articles can be sent on disc or by e-mail (mail@the-soc.org.uk), although we do still accept typed or handwritten material.

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NEWS & NOTICES

200 Club

The latest prizewinners are – **November: 1st** £150 Mr. J.C.Jackson, **2nd** £75 Mr. J. Ballantyne, **3rd** £50 Dr. A.M.Insh, **4th** £30 Miss S. Stuart, **5th** £20 Mrs. J. Denny, **6th** £10 Miss R. Davidson. **December: 1st** £30 Miss J. Wilcox, **2nd** £20 Mrs. M.C. Lawrie, **3rd** £10 Mr. C.G.Pearson. **January: 1st** £30 Mr. J.C. Jackson, **2nd** £20 Mr.C.G. Pearson, **3rd** £10 Mr. D. Clugston.

Please note that the "new year" starts in June and any new members would be very welcome. They must be SOC members and over eighteen. Please contact Daphne Peirse-Duncombe at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire, TD6 9NH.

New SOC members

We welcome the following new members to the club: **Ayrshire:** Dr J Cassels, Mr & Mrs C Conner, Mr A Maxwell. **Borders:** Mr M Aungier, Mr & Mrs J Craig, Mr M J Geen. **Central Scotland:** Mrs A Carrington-Cotton, Miss R Cumming, Dr E M Humphreys, Ms J Kaye, Dr A G Renwick. **Clyde:** Mr J Edwards, Mr M Given, Mr R Lennox, Mr H MacDondald & family, Mr W A Mackintosh, Ms E McLaughlin, Mr R Wilson-Parr. **Dumfries:** Mr D R Baillie and family, Mr L W Gibb. **England, Wales & NI:** Mrs W M Black, Mr & Mr I Davidson, Mr J Fenton, Mr P Johnson, Mrs T J Spring-Smythe, Mr N R Winn. **Fife:** Dr E A P Adams, Mr P Dean. Highland: Mr M Benson, Mr & Mrs Campbell, Dr I Evans, Mr J D Law, Prof W W McBryde. **Lothian:** Mr & Mrs A C Baird, Mr & Mrs P S Bolt, Mr & Mrs D W H Cameron, Mr J N Daisley, Mr & Mrs I G Dalton, Mrs A J DeBusk, Mr Al W Dickie, Miss & Dr A E Doherty, Mr & Mrs J Fraser, Mr G J Fitchett, Mr & Mrs P Freshwater, Mr K J Garden, Dr M A Grubb, Mr R J Hewat, Mr G Hills, Miss C A Hooper, Mr S Lee, Mr R Leslie, Mr R J MacLeod, Mr & Mrs J Marr, Mr D F Mather & Dr H Hart, Mr S Maxwell, Mr & Mrs A K McDiarmid, Mrs J I McKeand, Mr D McNee, Mr R Menzies, Mr G Moffat, Mr G Morrice, Mr & Mrs M J Muir, Mr J Nicholls, Miss J H Parmee, Mrs B Porter, Mr G F Reed, Mr S M Robertson, Mrs C & Mr A Robson, Ms E Seawright, Mr C D Shepherd, Mr P Summers, Mr M Thornton, Prof & Mrs C Trevarthen, Mrs D Tudhope & family, Mr & Mrs D M Watson, Mrs M A Whale. **Orkney:** Mr D Kent. **Overseas:** Mr L Kiff. **Tayside:** Dr R G Paul, Mr J Roy. **West Galloway:** Mr P Robinson.

Mapping local bird records using spreadsheet facilities on domestic computers

The mapping of bird records is clearly one of the best ways to portray distribution, but it is often assumed to require the purchase of specialised computer programmes. However, most domestic computers (PC or Mac) include a spreadsheet with a variety of options for presenting data graphically and it is basically not difficult to use one of these options to plot data on a square grid and add in simple topographical information to make a basic map.

I am not a computer expert but have been messing around with various computer generated diagrams available on Excel spreadsheets for some years and anyone trying to use the instructions should be familiar with the general background to producing such diagrams. Although the principles of mapping using standard graph techniques are quite straightforward, their practical implementation involves a great deal of finicky detail. I have produced some detailed instructions, available to those interested, which will help when read in conjunction with using their computer. They refer to a system developed on a Macintosh (Claris Works) version of the widely used Excel spreadsheet, but they should be applicable to Microsoft versions (though some of the nomenclature and detailed keyboard procedures may differ slightly). I would be interested to hear from anyone who has problems or finds slightly different procedures if they are using a Windows (PC) version of the spreadsheet. It is of course most straightforward if the original records (whether on cards or a computer database) have a National Grid map reference entered by the observer, but I was especially interested in using records, especially old ones, that only have a locality label and the detailed instructions start with this problem.

I would be happy to email the detailed instructions to anyone interested. Please e-mail: cjh@cliffhenty.plus.com

Cliff Henty

Update on the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group

I am the SOC's representative on the above group, launched in 2003 as a partnership between RSPB Scotland, BTO Scotland, SOC, SNH, JNCC, Scottish Raptor Study Groups and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. Membership of this group continues to build on the reputation of the SOC as Scotland's bird club, representing the views of birdwatchers across the country and promoting our network of members and the wealth of bird information within the SOC. I try to emphasise this aspect at the meetings and participate fully in the decisions made. No longer SOC President, I now update Janet with activities of the group so that she can keep Council up to date. Three or four meetings are held each year, hosted by one of the member organi-

sations. Now that Waterston House is open, the SOC will host the spring meeting - the first time we have been able to invite the group to our centre.

Much of our recent business has been drawing up plans for a series of Species Conservation Frameworks. Some independent research on Golden Eagles pioneered this approach and new work on Hen Harrier and Peregrine is starting this spring. Buzzard and Merlin have been identified as other priority species. The work will analyse what we know about Scottish populations of these raptors and assess what environmental factors are affecting them both across the whole country and, where appropriate, on a regional basis. Such information is key to presenting sound scientifically based recommendations for the conservation of birds of prey.

The group also leads on the compilation of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Report, compiled by the Raptor Monitoring Officer, Brian Etheridge, and distributed free to all SOC members. The SOC can continue to publish this report through grant aid from SNH. Last year's report (covering 2003) moved to a new format, and further improvements are planned for the next report due later this year. The data for the report is collected by Brian largely from the work of Raptor Study Group members. The improved data-handling processes now in place give greater authority to the data presented and will allow us in time to have a robust series of data from which to analyse population trends and other factors.

Another aspect of the work of the group has been the compilation of a manual for raptor monitoring, which will be launched in late March/April, after the Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference this year.

Mark Holling

The 2005 BTO Conference

Conferences are not everyone's cup of tea, and those that do attend are likely to be regulars. It is a time to meet old friends and make new ones, but also to learn more about our birds. The annual BTO Conference held in December at Swanwick, in Derbyshire, is perhaps a relatively long journey for us north of the border. This most recent conference proved that some consider this journey well worth undertaking. Of the 300 or more delegates, Scotland provided 23 from as far afield as Shetland and the Western Isles (with even a kilt on show at the annual dinner). While the talks are perhaps a little more scientific in content than at our own conferences, in keeping with the BTO's aim at marrying conservation with science, speakers pitch their talk at the right level to an audience ranging from garden birdwatchers to academics. Indeed, the Witherby Memorial Lecture this year was called 'Science and Conservation', and was an excellent and often humorous presentation by Bill Sutherland, Professor of Ecology at the University of East Anglia.

The theme of the conference was 'Tracking Birds' with talks based on radar, ringing and satellite studies and results from national surveys. The speakers were also a varied group from Sweden, Ireland, Denmark, England and three from Scotland (Raymond Duncan, Will Cresswell and Sarah Wanless). For me, the highlight was hearing Thomas Alerstam, Professor of Ecology at Lund University, Sweden, talking about his work on radar - and satellite-tracked birds of northern latitudes. We heard of the techniques used by Swifts when roosting on the wing, the travels of Great Skuas, of which some spend a long period in mid Atlantic and the movements of arctic geese crossing the Greenland icecap. Indeed, a recurrent theme in the conference was the increasing sophistication of technology, some methods almost superseding ringing as a tool to discover the detailed movements of birds. Devices used in tracking continue to get smaller, so that perhaps one day we may be able to track small passerines - what revelations we can expect if that becomes possible! As it is, current studies are revealing mind-blowing complexities in bird movements.

Displays included the results of both national and local surveys and there were the usual quizzes, shops and the art exhibition. BTO conferences also allow Regional Representatives to get together to discuss current and future surveys and their problems so that you, the birders who contribute so much, are able to enjoy your fieldwork at the same time as gathering vital data that goes towards understanding our birds and, eventually, helping to conserve them. Of the 50 UK reps present, five were from Scotland, the most present for many years.

The BTO and SOC have been partners in some of the most important ornithological projects over the years. The forthcoming National Atlas repeat in 2007-11 is yet another major collaborative undertaking. This will be a vital project that will show how our own Scottish bird populations have fared in recent decades, and will need all our support. Those of you who are BTO members (and there are around 1000 in Scotland) will have read Chris Wernham's complimentary article in *BTO News* about the Waterston House opening, indicative of the close ties between the two organisations.

If you are a BTO member who has not attended a BTO weekend conference, consider it in the future; it's well worth it.

Norman Elkins

Photo winner

The photo of a Meadow Pipit and Cuckoo (opposite) won the *British Birds* bird photograph of the year award for 2004. It was taken near Beeswing (Kirkudbrightshire) by Edmund Fellowes on 21st April 2004 – many congratulations.

Update on the Atlas of Birds in Britain and Ireland 2007–2011

Since I last wrote a year ago (*SBN* 75), there have been two further meetings of the Atlas Working Group and the two representatives from Scotland (Martin Cook of Moray and myself) have attended both meetings down at the BTO in Thetford. You will remember that the new Atlas will include fieldwork in both the winter period (November to February) and the breeding season, and that the survey starts in the winter of 2007-08, less than two years away now. The methodology for the breeding season will be broadly similar to that used last time round (1988-91), but there will be changes to the winter fieldwork. Some of you may have been helping fashion the methods by doing development fieldwork over this last winter. I'm pleased to say that up to 19 10-km squares have been surveyed in Scotland this winter, a good showing, especially when the work required was quite rigorous. Those I have spoken to have enjoyed doing the work and, as ever, have enjoyed the excitement of discovering new species in new and unexpected places. "Roving Recorders" have been trying to find as many species as possible in each 10-km square, which has introduced a bit of competition in the survey. In the square including Aberlady, we have volunteers doing timed counts in all parts of the square and a small team of roving recorders. At the end of December we were pleased to have found exactly 100 species in the area, and more were added as the New Year's visits took place. Martin and I would be interested to hear of any other experiences of the fieldwork undertaken this winter, or any other aspects of the Atlas. Please write to us, or email us, via the SOC HQ.

Over the summer, scientists at the BTO will pore over the results and find the best methodology for logging the maximum number of species in an area at minimal effort by the fieldworkers – that's you and I! Martin and I also met with the Scottish BTO Regional Representatives in February to discuss the future implementation of the project across the country, and all these points go into the process of refining the project.

Cuckoo and Meadow Pipit
(Edmund Fellowes)

As well as planning how the fieldwork will run, the meetings have been looking at how data will be collected this time round. Twenty years ago, everything had to be paper-based, but there is an opportunity to collect records on computers and over the internet now, as well as on paper. The group is being careful to learn from the experiences of the previous Atlas projects, both national and local ones. Martin and I are making a strong case for methods which take account of the remoteness and inaccessibility of many Scottish squares, and the paucity of fieldworkers in many areas.

As was mentioned before, the SOC will provide the lead in co-ordinating fieldwork in Scotland and the organisation will be run from Waterston House in Aberlady. We do hope that there will be a tremendous response to the call for fieldwork in the years ahead, but if you really are unable to contribute in this way, we hope that you will be able to contribute financially through forthcoming appeals. However, the results, the maps, the book and the essential information for conservation will all make it worthwhile.

Mark Holling

New Year's Honours

Two eminent SOC members were awarded an MBE in this year's honours list. Patrick Stirling-Aird, Secretary, Scottish Raptor Study Groups, for his services to wildlife conservation, and Bryan Nelson, ecologist and ethologist for his services to marine ornithology, especially conservation of Abbot's Booby and Christmas Island. Heartiest congratulations from everyone.

SBRC choice

Alan Lauder is its candidate for joining that body next autumn. Alan currently lives in Dunblane, and has served in various conservation roles, including posts with the BTO, and his current post with RSPB in Scotland. A skilled birdwatcher, he has carried out much of his hobby within Scotland and has an excellent working knowledge of Scottish birds, enhanced by experience gained from several overseas trips.

Photographs for BS3

The *BS3* team are looking for even more photos for use in *BS3*. We have received a superb response to our requests and we are making good progress in reaching the target of 500 photos - but we still need more! Rather than limiting ourselves to text-book, full-frame images, we would also like to include a wide range of atmospheric, group, flight, habitat, behavioural shots – even two birds together rather than one. Remember that we require all photos to have been taken in Scotland. A new cut-off date for the submission of images has now been set for the end of December 2006.

I'm sure with everyone's help we will be able to amass, for the first time, an amazing collection of photographs depicting the very best of Scotland's birds.

The first list includes common/scarce species for which we would like to build on what we currently hold – sometimes this is nothing.

European White-fronted Goose, Canada Goose (moulting flock?), Shelduck (with young or large moulting flock), Wigeon (flock in flight?), Gadwall, Teal (flock/flight), Pintail, Pochard, Common Scoter, Velvet Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, Great Crested Grebe (display?), Red-necked Grebe, Black-necked Grebe, Sooty Shearwater, Manx Shearwater, Leach's Storm-petrel (not flash), Hen Harrier (display/flight), Moorhen, Grey Plover, Ruff, Turnstone, Long-tailed Skua, Little Gull, Roseate Tern, Common Tern, Little Tern, Black Tern, Little Auk (flock in flight), Feral Pigeon (in urban habitat), Collared Dove, Stock Dove, Yellow Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Waxwing (the ultimate shot!), Greenland Wheatear, Ring Ouzel, Redwing, Grasshopper Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Blackcap, Willow Warbler, Magpie, Jackdaw, Brambling, Greenfinch and Linnet.

If you think you can help with the above species, please contact: **Ian Andrews, 39 Clayknowes Drive, Musselburgh, EH21 6UW. email: ian@andrewsi.freeserve.co.uk**

We are also seeking images for a few of the more obscure species for which no photograph has yet been submitted (even a 'record shot' would be sufficient). In some cases, we are hoping to find better images of birds for which we already have photographs. With one year to go, we are asking that you bear in mind the following list of rare species in case you are fortunate enough to see them in Scotland this year whilst out with your camera? For some of these birds, we know images do exist - can you help in tracking them down?

Photographers we are trying to contact; David MacLeman: Sandhill Crane/Spotted Sandpiper/Franklin's Gull, **Noel Kerns:** American Robin, **Alan Josey:** River Warbler, **Nick Wall:** Needle-tailed Swift, **George Winslow:** Cretzschmar's Bunting, **Mary MacIntyre:** Chimney Swift and **M H Blattner:** Trumpeter Finch.

Rare species we still require photographs of; Lesser white-fronted Goose, Golden Pheasant, Cory's Shearwater, Balearic Shearwater, American Bittern, Purple Heron, Marsh Harrier, Hobby, Sora, Marsh Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper, Bridled Tern, Royal Tern, Whiskered Tern, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Common Nighthawk, Chimney Swift, Woodlark, Siberian Blue Robin, Eastern Bonelli's Warbler, Spanish Sparrow, Marmora's Warbler, Trumpeter Finch, White-crowned Sparrow, Cretzschmar's Bunting, Pallas's Bunting, Cinamon Teal, Red-headed Bunting and Pallas's Rosefinch.

Rare species to be improved upon; Ruddy Shelduck, Blue-winged Teal, Green-winged Teal, Garganey, Surf Scoter, Pied-billed Grebe, Squacco Heron, Little Crake, Avocet, Black-winged Pratincole, Greater Sandplover, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Franklin's Gull, Sabine's Gull, Gull-billed

Tern, Caspian Tern, Lesser Crested Tern, Black-billed Cuckoo, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Calandra Lark, Tawny Pipit, Red-throated Pipit, Common Nightingale, Red-flanked Bluetail, Dusky Thrush, Melodious Warbler, Great Reed Warbler, Radde's Warbler, Red-eyed Vireo, Southern Grey Shrike, Serin, Chestnut Bunting.

If you can help in any way with the rarity requests list above, please contact: **Harry Scott, 51 Charlton Crescent, Aboyne, Aberdeenshire AB34 5GN. E-mail: picades@ifb.co.uk**

Birdwatch with caution

As the nesting season approaches, members are reminded that the Birdwatchers' Code of Conduct (see SOC website) should be observed. With new access legislation, the main concerns are disturbance to Schedule 1 species and in sensitive habitats like along water margins.

Keep disturbance to a minimum. Birds' tolerance of disturbance varies between species and seasons. Therefore, it is safer to keep all disturbance to a minimum. No birds should be disturbed from the nest in case opportunities for predators to take eggs or young are increased. In very cold weather disturbance to birds may cause them to use vital energy at a time when food is difficult to find. Wildfowlers already impose bans during cold weather: birdwatchers should exercise similar discretion.

Rare breeding birds. If you discover a rare bird breeding and feel that protection is necessary, inform the appropriate RSPB Regional Office, or the Species Protection Department at the Lodge. Otherwise it is best in almost all circumstances to keep the record strictly secret in order to avoid disturbance by other birdwatchers and attacks by egg-collectors - though it is highly desirable that the record should be reported to local bird recorders for proper documentation. Never visit known sites of rare breeding birds unless they are adequately protected. Even presence may give away the site to others and cause so many other visitors that the birds may fail to breed successfully. Disturbance at or near the nest of species listed on the First Schedule of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is a criminal offence.

Mark Holling

Donald Watson appreciation continued;

they made him their first Honorary Member. His involvement in ornithology continued unabated and he was President of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club from 1969-72, becoming Honorary President in 1986 to mark the Club's 50th anniversary. He was local bird recorder in Galloway for some 30 years.

In addition to his war service overseas, Donald painted in various parts of the world, including France, Africa, America, Spain and the Seychelles. However, it was his evocative and atmospheric paintings of birds in Galloway that were to attract the greatest acclaim, together with his wonderful treatment of waders and wildfowl on wet sands in the Hebrides and the Solway. His skies were legendary. Of his own art, Donald said `My eyes respond to colour, tone, light and modelling forms, whether of living creatures or land masses. I enjoy painting skies, water, wet sand or mud and coping with the technical problems that lack of solidity presents.' That great wildfowl expert, Hugh Boyd, now living in Canada, rated him amongst the very finest painters of geese. Other experienced field ornithologists marvelled at his ability to capture the essence of spring in a humble Willow Warbler perched on a budding sprig, the `choreography' of a group of lekking Blackcock on a moor, or a gathering of Hen Harriers at roost in the gloaming. In 1972, Scottish Academic Press published Birds of Moor and Mountain, written and illustrated by Watson, and this book showcased his distinctive birds-in-landscape approach, hinted at in the earlier `Oxford volume', to a very wide audience. Most of the paintings in this book were in an attractive Galloway setting, often depicting relatively unspoilt countryside that had disappeared from so much of the rest of the country, together with its dependent wildlife. Moreover, this book demonstrated Donald's complementary talent as an evocative writer – he could paint wonderful pictures with words as well. His talent for writing was evident as early as his sixteenth year, when he won the RSPB's public schools essay competition with his `Wings and their uses.' An avid reader, he loved lyrical poetry and prose, especially in the hands of expert naturalists such as John Clare and Frenchman, Jacques Delamain. Donald wrote beautifully and compellingly married his artistic and literary talents together in The Hen Harrier (Poyser, 1977), and the autobiographical A Bird Artist in Scotland (Witherby, 1988) and One Pair of Eyes (Arlequin, 1994). In this way, Donald was able to convey the beauty and mysterious enchantment of nature that, remarkably, stimulated so many people to write to him or visit his home to give thanks for so skilfully capturing and relating the essence of their own wonder.

Undoubtedly, the species that he was most associated with was his beloved Hen Harrier, one of the most beautiful and artistically pleasing of all our birds, yet the most persecuted because of its ability to take Red Grouse. Widespread conifer afforestation in Galloway from the 1950s brought a reduction in game preservation and an early flush of vegetation that was to benefit many species, including Hen Harriers and Golden Eagles. Donald meticulously studied and recorded the breeding, hunting and roosting habits of the former in a pioneering way, and his book on the Hen Harrier is a classic marriage of bird study and art that stimulated a generation of field ornithologists and bird artists. Although communal roosting of harriers was well known in Europe and North America, it had been little recorded in the UK, and in collaboration with R.C. Dickson, R. Gladwell and others, Donald unravelled some of the mysteries of this behaviour, with published papers in Scottish Birds and elsewhere. He also recorded the subsequent maturation of these forests with the resulting loss of important wildlife, and collaborated with his great friend Derek Ratcliffe, former Chief Scientist of the Nature Conservancy, who died earlier this year, in pressing for the kind of improvements in forestry practice that we are now beginning to see.

The Tourist Board surely owe Donald a great debt of gratitude, because for the past fifty years he has portrayed the beauty, bird life and tranquillity of Dumfries & Galloway to a very wide audience. Very many of them have visited Galloway to enjoy for themselves the wonderful scenes that he painted. In addition to his wonderful art and writings, surely one of his most enduring legacies is his kindness and attentiveness in stimulating and encouraging the interest of all who in some way shared his passion for birds and the countryside. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him, and Galloway has lost one of its greatest devotees.

Donald Watson died at Dumfries on 7 November 2005, after a short illness. He was buried at St John's Town of Dalry, Galloway, on Monday 14 November 2005. His wife Joan died on 10 September 2004. They are survived by son Jeff, a Director with Scottish Natural Heritage, and daughters Pam, Kate and Louise.

Chris Rollie

George Lodge at work in the 1940s *(Illustrated)*

Bannerman and Lodge

SOC members may recall that, until a few years ago, the substantial "George Lodge Fund" used to feature regularly in the club's Annual Report and Accounts. Sadly, its identity now seems to have disappeared as it was amalgamated in 2004 as part of the "Endowment Capital Fund".

The George E. Lodge Trust was formed in 1944 in order that its funds would be used to support the cost of publication of *The Birds of the British Isles* and "similar original works in Natural History". The twelve volume *The Birds of the British Isles*, written by David Bannerman and illustrated by George Lodge, was published by Oliver and Boyd from 1953 to 1963. It was a mammoth undertaking and, even by the much more scientific standards of today, remains a hugely impressive memorial to both writer and artist. In his preface to the first volume, Bannerman wrote that "In addition to contributing 384 original paintings, Mr Lodge most generously donated £5000 [a lot of money then] towards the cost of reproduction". Lodge took on the project in 1942, at the remarkable age of 81, and died in 1954 after publication of just three volumes.

The George Lodge Trust Fund grew with income derived from sales of *The Birds of the British Isles* and was used subsequently to support publication of ornithological books and particularly the cost of their illustration. After Bannerman's death in 1979, the Trust was chaired by his cousin General Sir Philip Christison, and it included SOC members Donald Watson, Archie Bryson and Andrew Macmillan. In 1985, the trustees agreed to wind up the Trust and transfer its funds (over £10,000) and stock of about 3000 copies of volumes 6-12 of *The Birds of the British Isles* to the SOC Endowment Fund. This was duly done and no restrictions were placed on the payment except that it be used by SOC in accordance with the purposes of the Trust. The trustees asked that part of the Fund might be used to support bird illustrations and bird book publications and suggested that some of it might be applied in an appropriate memorial to Lodge to which his name could be attached. As this last request does not appear to have been realised, and as we no longer have a named George Lodge Fund, now would seem to be a good time for SOC to finally make some sort of permanent gesture in recognition of Lodge's contribution.

So who were the similarly long-lived Bannerman and Lodge?

David Armitage Bannerman (1886-1979)
Raised in London, David Bannerman was educated at Wellington College and Cambridge University, where he graduated with an honours degree in science. He wrote his first book at the age of eight, and told his mother early in life "I am going to be an ornithologist and join the British Natural History Museum". This he did in 1910, when he became a trainee in the "Bird Room" under W. R. Ogilvie-Grant. It was there he met for the first time the bird artist George Lodge who was 26 years his senior. He was determined to work in the field as much as possible, preferably abroad, and between 1908 and 1913 carried out an extensive zoological survey of the Canary Islands. There he met his first wife who he married in 1911. Before the 1914-18 war, he also made expeditions to Africa, South America and West Indies.

George Lodge in his studio (1951) *(H. Savory)*

David and Mary Bannerman
(Portsmouth & Sunderland Newspapers Ltd.)

Despite failing his army medical after the outbreak of war due to partial deafness caused by childhood measles, he soon managed to get to France as an ambulance driver and was then appointed staff officer to HQ British Red Cross Society. He was awarded the MBE, Order of St John, Mons Star and French War Medal for his services. In 1919, he turned down the opportunity of taking charge of the Bird Room at South Kensington, preferring to become a supernumerary member of the museum staff. He said he had tasted too much freedom to be tied down to the restricted life of a London civil servant.

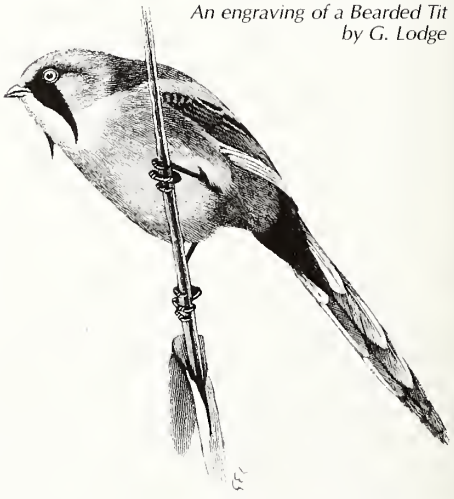
Between the wars, he travelled extensively, mainly on British Museum expeditions, collecting and reporting on the birds of several West African countries. He was a skilled horseman, excellent shot and loved fly fishing. He took a prominent part in BOU affairs and was assistant editor of *The Ibis* for ten years. By the age of 40 he had published about 100 scientific papers. In 1922 he wrote *The Canary Islands: their History, Natural History and Scenery*, and was later commissioned to write his first magnum opus, the eight volume *The Birds of Tropical West Africa* (1930-51). To provide the plates for this series, he recruited some of the leading bird artists of the time and invited George Lodge to illustrate the more colourful species such as glossy starlings and sunbirds. Thus began his collaboration and friendship with Lodge, and it was during the 1939-45 war, when he was a censor and sergeant in the Home Guard, that they discussed and planned *The Birds of the British Isles*. Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke was one who took a great interest in the progress of this book and wrote the foreword to its first volume. Bannerman was a peerless compiler who greatly enhanced his text with contributions from specialists, many of whom were his personal friends. As an ornithologist, he was deeply rooted in the older traditions, and had no time for much modern scientific writing.

Between 1950 and 1952 he visited Morocco with his second wife Mary, herself a distinguished ornithologist, and lived among Atlas tribesmen. After his retirement in 1952, they moved to Kirkcudbrightshire and took up farming under the shadow of Criffel. They often birdwatched in the Galloway countryside and travelled abroad regularly in the winter, gathering material for further books. *The Birds of Cyprus* appeared in 1958, and the four volumes of *The Birds of the Atlantic Islands* were published from 1963 to 1968, the last two with his wife as joint author. More followed and, in spite of recurring illness, he continued writing in his final years, encouraged by his wife. He had almost finished *The Birds of the Balearic Islands*, illustrated by Donald Watson, at the time of his death.

Altogether Bannerman wrote more than 30 volumes on birds, the like of which will not be seen again. He was a Fellow or member of several ornithological societies and received many honours and awards, among them OBE, LLD, FRSE and the Gold Medal of the BOU. As an Honorary President of the SOC, he often travelled from his home on the Solway to take an active part in council meetings.

George Edward Lodge (1860-1954)

In 1860 were born three outstanding wildlife artists who set new standards in their genre. Most famous of all was the Swede Bruno Liljefors, and in Britain there were Archibald Thorburn and George Lodge. Lodge was born at Scrivelsby in Lincolnshire, the seventh son of a seventh son, and one of a family of eleven. His father was a Canon of Lincoln and for many years Rector of Scrivelsby, who wrote a history of the Champions of England, of whom Scrivelsby is the home. He inherited his artistic skills from his mother, who was descended from Francis Wheatley and Clara Pope, both celebrated painters who exhibited at the Royal Academy. Educated at home from an early age, he and his brother Reginald, the pioneer bird photographer, were keen naturalists and roamed the local countryside in search of subjects. At the age of 12 he stuffed his first bird, an owl, at 14 he won prizes for drawing at the Lincoln School of Art and at 16 he was apprenticed to a wood engraver.



An engraving of a Bearded Tit by G. Lodge

Lodge soon became an expert at hand-engraving his own artwork on the end grain of very hard box wood. This exquisitely detailed illustrative work required the use of a magnifier for one eye, and his sight suffered for this subsequently, so much so that he lost the use of that eye towards the end of his life. His draughtsmanship was superior to and his engraving was equal to those of the great Thomas Bewick, and one can find fine examples of his engraved illustrations in books by Lord Lilford, Millais, Saunders, Seebohm and others. When wood-engraving was superseded by modern printing techniques in the 1890s, Lodge took to painting in tempera his illustrations for bird books. He also painted in oils and twelve of his works were exhibited in the Royal Academy between 1881 and 1917.

In 1885, he was introduced to the sport of falconry by T.J. Mann, a member of the Mann brewing family, after being commissioned to illustrate an article on the subject written by E.B. Michell. Thus began his lifelong passion for hawking and a close friendship with the Manns whom he accompanied on their regular Scottish shooting holidays. Like Bannerman, he was an all-round sportsman, being a first-rate shot, deer stalker and fly fisherman as well as falconer. Many of his shot specimens he mounted expertly for use in his paintings. From 1885 to 1913, he kept a diary recording his frequent hawking expeditions, first with the Manns in Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire, and later with Gilbert Blaine in Islay and Caithness. In the early 1930s he was artist observer at the annual meets on Salisbury Plain of the recently formed British Falconers' Club. These gatherings included well-known falconers like Jack Mavrogordato, Phillip Glasier and also my father, Harry Savory, whose friendship with Lodge continued until Lodge's death.

Lodge was a modest man who never married. He lived in London from 1880 to 1920 and then moved with an elder sister and niece to "Hawk House" in Camberley where he remained for the rest of his life. He travelled widely, to the West Indies in 1896, to Norway several times for shooting and fishing with his friend Johnny Millais and round the world in 1903 with John and Percy Mann. He loved Scotland, where he stayed many times, and his Highland sporting paintings were in great demand like those of his friend Thorburn.

The female peregrine Sylvia, on Red Grouse (G. Lodge)

By the time I compiled *George Lodge: Artist Naturalist*, published by Croom Helm in 1986, illustrations by Lodge had featured in at least 90 published works and I have found more since then. His paintings were also used in illustrated articles in various magazines. The only book he wrote himself - *Memoirs of an Artist Naturalist*, with 24 plates, appeared in 1946, and in 1942 he told Bannerman that it was his ambition to illustrate entirely a book on British birds, hence *The Birds of the British Isles*. However, his eyesight was going, and his portrayal of species, where he had to work from museum skins, was never as successful as those with which he was familiar. Lodge and Thorburn were equally expert at painting landscapes, gamebirds and deer, but Lodge was better with oils and Thorburn conceded that he was also the master at birds of prey. He was not so good at other subjects and, since their deaths, Thorburn's paintings have commanded higher prices.

Lodge was active in ornithological circles, being elected a member of the BOU in 1897 and one of its Vice-Presidents in 1945. He was a Fellow of the Zoological Society of London and attended the 1934 International Ornithological Congress in Oxford. He was also a Council member of other societies, some of which, including the RSPB, used his paintings as Christmas cards.

In his obituary of George Lodge in *The Field*, 25 February 1954, J. K. Stanford wrote "What a lesson to all of us, what a life to have led. To have made a living out of the thing you liked best in the world. To have known that your work sends those who see it back delightedly in thought to the salmon river, the forest, the crags and the hills, and the deer and the birds they have watched there".

John Savory

Hunting group (c.1890) with Lodge and T.J. Mann sitting on the right

Forestry and Birds in Scotland

Ospreys at Glentress *(Forestry Commission)*

Moira Baptie, Environment Manager at Forest Enterprise Scotland, continues her perspective on how the relationship between forestry and birds in Scotland has developed.

Part 2

External verification of management practices is always reassuring both for our external stakeholders and ourselves. Management of the national forest estate by Forest Enterprise Scotland is audited annually against the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS) as part of the FSC certification process. FSC certification allows purchasers of timber to be sure that the timber has come from a sustainably managed forest. All of the Scottish timber donated by the Forestry Commission for **Waterston House** as part of our Concordat with SOC, came from UKWAS and FSC certified forests managed by FCS.

Many UKWAS requirements are very positive for birds. UKWAS requires the **identification and careful management of semi-natural wooded and open habitats**. It requires a minimum of 15% of the forest area to be managed with conservation and enhancement of biodiversity as a major objective and has a whole section on the protection of rare habitats and species including UKBAP species. It also requires the restructuring of conifer forests to create a diverse age structure and species mix, and an increase in the use of lower impact sivicultural systems such as continuous cover rather than clearfell. It requires natural reserves and long- term retentions to be designated. It recognises the importance of ancient woodland sites and requires restoration plans and targets for the sites that have been planted, which are known as PAWS (Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites). It also requires the retention of standing and fallen deadwood within both plantation and semi-natural woodland.

Many of our forests were planted relatively recently and it takes time for deadwood and veteran trees to develop. **Deadwood** is therefore an important element that is found in natural forests, which we need to try to recreate in our Scottish forests. It is extremely important both for invertebrate species and for hole nesting birds. Each Forest District has a statement describing how they will locally increase and manage deadwood so that it will have the greatest environmental benefit.

Owls, both Barn and Tawny have benefited from the nest barrels that have been erected in Galloway, Kintyre, Cowal & Trossachs and Fort Augustus. Forests could provide three of the elements that owls require – hunting habitat, an abundance of small prey and freedom from frequent disturbance. The barrels provided the fourth vital element – nest sites. Some schemes such as the one in Galloway have been running for over 20 years.

Barn Owl nestbox *(Harry Scott)*

Forestry Commission Scotland has been instrumental in assisting the spread of **Ospreys** throughout Scotland. Through the work of wildlife rangers and their tree climbing skills many nesting platforms for Ospreys have been built in safe secure places. These artificial sites can attract young birds and save them time building

nests thus increasing the likelihood of successful breeding and chick survival. Ospreys' 50th, a partnership project with RSPB, is a three-year celebration of the 50th anniversary of the return of Ospreys to breed in Scotland in 1954 after an absence of 38 years. Other partners include the Scottish Wildlife Trust, Kailzie Gardens, Dumfries & Galloway Council, the Scottish Raptor Study Groups and the Highland Foundation for Wildlife. The project covers six Osprey viewing facilities in Scotland that allow the public to see these magnificent birds at close quarters. The sites are managed by FCS, RSPB, SWT and Dumfries & Galloway Council and wonderful stories have come out of all six sites that have captivated the public and the press. The two FCS sites at Aberfoyle and in Glentress have also had their nail biting moments, when a natural nest site was blown out of a tree at Aberfoyle and David Anderson raced to save the chicks and build a new nest for them. In Glentress this year we watched with baited breadth to see if the youngest chick of four, that had been named "Errol", would survive the wrath of his siblings in the fight for food. Luckily both stories had a happy ending! If you would like to watch the stories unfold next season and see live images then visit www.forestry.gov.uk/tweedvalleyospreys, which also has links to the FCS viewing site at Aberfoyle. All the Ospreys' 50th partners also have websites, but rather than just visit the website you might like to visit the actual sites.

Sometimes creating nest sites isn't enough as populations have actually been lost in certain areas. We have worked closely with Roy Dennis and SNH over the years to help provide chicks for translocation projects to other areas, both in Scotland and further afield. This has resulted in Osprey chicks from Scotland helping to recolonise England under the Rutland Water translocation project. Rutland birds have gone on to form the basis of the nascent Welsh breeding population. Other chicks have been donated to a project in Spain. Within Scotland, **Red Kites** have been translocated from FCS nest sites on the Black Isle to Perthshire and to Dumfries and Galloway. The Red Kite trail in Galloway, which allows the public to see them, is a partnership project with RSPB and local bodies.

The **Golden Eagle**, one of the most iconic birds in Scotland, has also been helped by building suitable nesting platforms on the edge of forests adjacent to open moorland. In Kintyre as part of a windfarm development, we have been involved in recreating important open moorland habitat within an eagle's home range by removing planted conifers and on Mull we plan not to replant key areas after they have been felled to help Golden Eagle ranges. We are not only helping Golden Eagle conservation in Scotland but also helping partners in Ireland by providing eaglets from eyries on the forest estate for the Golden Eagle Trust Ltd reintroduction scheme in Donegal, led by Lorcan O'Toole, with which the Irish Raptor Study Group is involved. A female Golden Eagle, taken from an eyrie on FCS land in Glen Affric in 2001, became the first to lay eggs in Ireland for almost 50 years.

Scotland has itself benefited from the re-introduction of **Sea Eagles** from Norway and several of the FCS managed forests down the west coast now provide nesting sites for these huge birds. The nest site on Mull that the public can view during the breeding season is on FCS managed land. We work closely in partnership with RSPB, the Mull & Iona Community Trust and local volunteers to run the sea eagle viewing facility and to protect the nest throughout the season. There are several CCTV viewing facilities in tourist information facilities or visitor centres around Scotland, which use nest sites within FCS management. These include Hen Harriers, Red Kites, Peregrines and Herons. Getting the public involved in conservation and allowing them to appreciate the richness of the habitats and species that Scotland is lucky to have, is one of the objectives of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, and FCS is keen to play a part in delivering this objective. Well managed wildlife viewing also has a key role to play in sustainable rural development through green tourism and we are keen to work with responsible local businesses and partners to develop projects that both safeguard the species and allow the public to see them.

There are **many other projects** and species that I could describe involving work with Crested Tits and Crossbills in our Caledonian Pinewood Reserves, boxes for Goldeneyes and habitat management for Nightjars in Dumfries and Galloway. Satellite tracking of Honey Buzzards and Ospreys with Roy Dennis' Highland Foundation for Wildlife has also given spectacular results.

Forestry has had its critics but the wonderful thing about being asked to write an article like this is that it makes me realise just how much work is actually being done. I think that the future is extremely positive for the care of Scotland's birds within the land managed by Scotland's foresters.

Moira Baptie,
Forestry Commission, Inverness
Moira.baptie@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Golden Eaglet *(Forestry Commission)*

The rise and fall of North-east Scottish inland gulleries

Common Gull colony at Bluemill *(Ian Francis)*

One of the more remarkable ornithological features of North-east Scotland is the inland Common Gull colonies, once alleged to be among the largest in the world. The birds were first reported by Dr.J.O. Wilson in 1889, on the hills around Huntly and feeding on the lower surrounding farmland. He said they had first been noticed with a few Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls twelve or fifteen years before (in the 1870s). He suggested that this might be due to the Sea Birds Preservation Act of 1869 or institution of the Gun License (though I wonder if the Victorian slaughter of predators was also important?). By the 1930s they were widespread, but there was no suggestion that many colonies were large. They appear to have increased when people were away or busy with little transport during World War II, and when myxomatosis led to a decline of Rabbit predators, especially Foxes, in the 1950s.

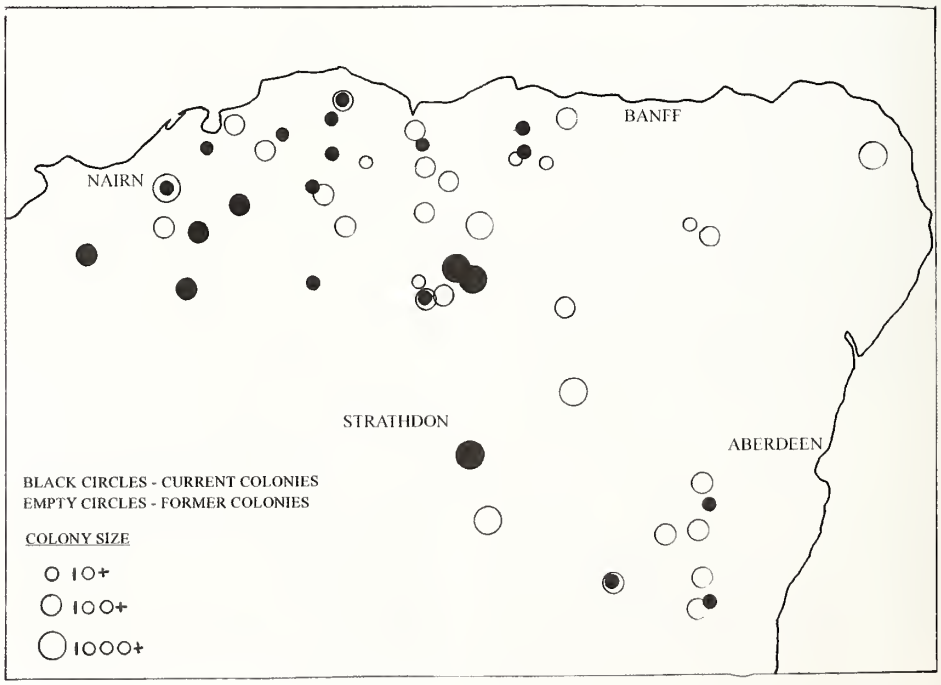
When I first visited the area in the late 1950s there was a huge population of Herring Gulls breeding along the coast, where they overflowed over the cliff tops. They fed behind fishing boats at sea or on farms inland according to the weather. There were scattered colonies of Black-headed Gulls on the waters and Common Gulls on the hills inland. When I returned in the 1970s the Rabbits were back, and more people were visiting the coast. The Herring Gulls were moving into town, while the inland gulleries were being displaced by drainage and forestry. The Common Gulls in particular occurred in a few large colonies, where the total may have reached many thousands in the 1980s, with much smaller numbers of large gulls, especially Lesser Black-backs, with some Herring Gulls and a few Greater Black-backs and Common Terns.

I was usually away then, but when I returned in the 1990s most of the large gulls and the terns had gone, and the small gulls were declining (see map). The Common Gulls from the small colonies deep in the hills normally appear to feed by quartering the moorland alone a few metres above the ground, and while their nesting sites may move around they do not show obvious fluctuations in breeding success. The more numerous birds breeding on the hilltops overlooking agricultural land (where the Common Gulls may benefit from game preservation though the big gulls may become targets), behave differently. They disperse high overhead and descend in numbers on possible food sources such as fields cut for silage, ploughing, pig-farms, dumps, and food put out in the garden. They show more variation in their breeding success. Large colonies are characterised by heather giving way to grass when fertilised by the birds, and are usually located overlooking agricultural land suitable for feeding (see photo on page 13).

A breeding failure was first noticed at a huge colony in the Correen Hills during the hot summer of 1973, when many chicks starved in July. The converse situation was seen there after storms on 12 June 1993. One to two thousand pairs of Common Gulls breeding on a ridge above 400 m had lost interest in their nests, only five of which still held one or two whole eggs, though there were many broken eggs, some still fresh, apparently sucked by an unprecedented flock of about fifty corvids working their way through the colony unhindered by the gulls. Other lower colonies were affected less. Over the next few years the exposed and increasingly overgrown Correen Hills were deserted, and Common Gulls returned to a former site in a sheltered valley at 300m, 12 km to the south-west in Strathdon at Bluemill.

Low chick productivity was also noticed in 1977, 1991, 1994, 1999, 2003, 2004 and 2005, sometimes when there was also a

Common Gull colony on the Correen Hills in 1993 - now almost deserted *(Ian Francis)*



Map showing some inland Common Gull colonies in North-East Scotland

Gull colony in open moorland (Bill Bourne)

poor breeding success among seabirds along the coast. This is being followed by a decline in the population. It is difficult to follow events at large gull colonies dispersed over remote broken ground in the hills, where in good years the whole hillside may appear to move with chicks, but in bad years they may be hard to find. When a few dozen birds breeding on Leuchar Moss near Aberdeen moved to an adjacent gas pipeline inspection station surrounded by bare gravel inside a predator-proof fence in the late 1990s, the birds arrived in March, started to lay in late April, all had chicks by June, and all left in July with few or no losses. In two years with a poor success elsewhere, 1999 and 2005, some did not lay at first, but later, together in late May, and in 1999 there were still one live and ten recently dead chicks after other birds had left on 12 August. There were few late nests in the colonies in the hills, where the birds usually left in July, and in poor years many may not have bred at all.

Thus in north-east Scotland, Common Gulls appear to have adapted successfully to modern agriculture, feeding in the fields and breeding on bare outlying hills lacking cover for predators, which in some cases are destroyed by gamekeepers. When the hills were progressively afforested from the 1950s the gulls congregated in a few large, high colonies, where they are exposed to bad weather, and drought sometimes also affects the invertebrates on which the chicks feed. Not only may there be a breeding failure, but also mortality of the adults on the shore during the subsequent moult, as I noted in 2003.

Common Gull on farmland near Alford (Ian Francis)

There may be a similar problem with Black-headed Gulls breeding around inland waters on the low ground. Several sites on Deeside were deserted after early gales and a later drought which also affected Common Gulls in 2003, including a long-established colony of over a thousand in a National Nature Reserve at Dinnet (Hans Kruuk and Harry Scott, per David Jenkins, pers. comm.). Possibly when conditions are poor, large gull colonies become vulnerable to intraspecific competition for food leading to a total breeding failure, after which gulls are liable to move elsewhere. The main factor affecting the breeding success of such species appears to be not so much long-term climatic change as weather events in a particular year.

Documentation and acknowledgements will be found in *Birds in Moray and Nairn 2003*: 91-101. I am particularly indebted to the Editor, Martin Cook, for assistance.

W.R.P. Bourne, Aberdeen University.

North-East Scotland Breeding Bird Atlas – the final lap

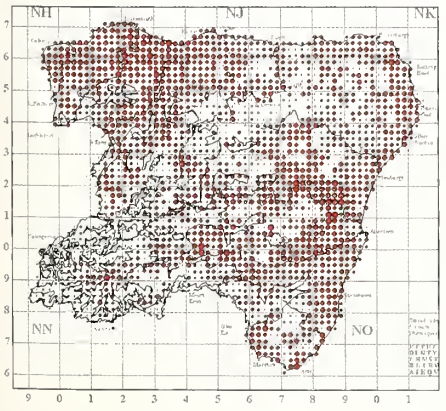
Fieldwork continued well in 2005, the fourth year of our five-year Breeding Bird Atlas in Aberdeenshire and Moray. Although it is a challenge meeting our annual coverage targets, there is still tremendous enthusiasm for the project. Over 300 people have contributed so far, producing some 80,000 records. The map shows the general level of coverage, with land over 300m shaded. We now have records from 2,202 of the 2,340 tetrads, though intensity of coverage still varies greatly. The gaps can be seen, and the Turriff to Keith area is a high priority for targeted visits! Parts of the Mearns in the south are also poorly covered – are there any Angus birders out there who wish to help?

One of the aims of the atlas is to allow comparison with the previous Aberdeenshire breeding atlas carried out in 1981-1984. The tetrad data have to be converted into the recording units used in that project, but some fascinating maps can be produced. For example, the Tree Sparrow (see maps) appears to have increased in range here over the last 20 years. We can easily make such comparisons, but we will also have to interpret them, including questions about coverage levels in the two atlases, and while some species clearly have changed in status, interpretation may be more complex for others. These issues will be considered carefully as the project draws to a close.

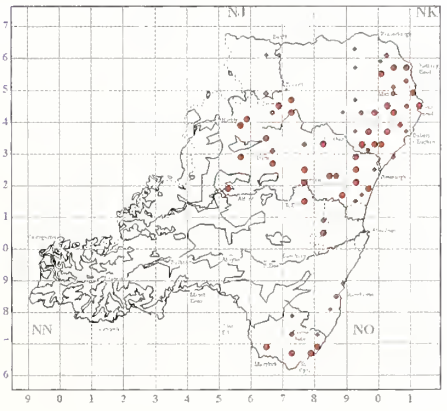
We are still in need of help from birdwatchers from out of the area in 2006. If any SOC member wishes to spend a weekend helping, we would be delighted to hear from them. Any birders living close to the borders of the area might also consider participating – if so, please contact me at: **ifnp@clara.co.uk (019755 62457) or Martin Cook for Moray on martin.cook9@virgin.net**.

Ian Francis

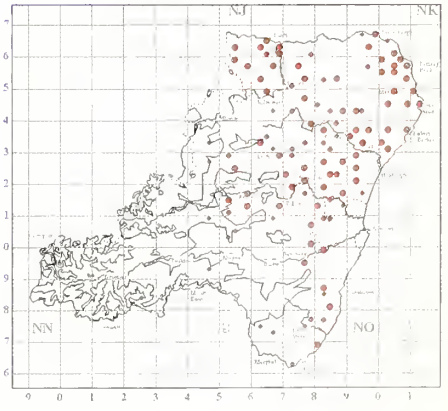
All species and all records 2002-2005, scaled by no of species per tetrad



Tree Sparrow 1981-1984



Tree Sparrow 2002-2004



Royal Troon G.C. *(Angus Hogg)*

Birding Links

It seems strange that the Scots, normally noted for their outstanding practicality and common sense, should lay claims to have invented the game of golf – surely one of the most frustrating pastimes "enjoyed" by millions across the world. However, I doubt if those early pioneers could have guessed at the positive impact their game was to have on our bird populations.

As those amongst you who are strictly non-golfers will know, golf is played on what at first glance looks like a short-cropped and carefully manicured swathe of greenery, with the occasional hazard zone e.g. bunkers and bushes. As far as coastal courses, or links, are concerned, the reality is much better than this may appear. Having long been an advocate of golf course development, I believe that these recreational areas have actually become 'reserves' which prove particularly useful for many species encountering problems elsewhere.

Over the past 35 years I've had the privilege of being able to visit Turnberry Golf Course and, more recently, Royal Troon. Along with occasional outings to other courses, the picture which has emerged is one which is very encouraging for wildlife. So, what makes links courses so good for birds?

Presently, all of Ayrshire's golf courses encompass a huge area of over 3000 hectares, almost 60% of which is classed as 'out of play'. Royal Troon links course, itself, is over 7000 metres in length. Coastal courses occupy a considerable slice of land, much of which would otherwise be threatened by developments such as housing or industry. Coastal sand dunes are vulnerable habitats, susceptible to problems such as erosion, and increases in human activity might result in serious damage to the plant and animal communities there. Naturally, this threat alone suggests that some action should be taken to protect these sites and the wildlife therein.

Most golf courses, including Turnberry and Royal Troon have management plans which include nature conservation as a key element. The active management of features such as turf grass and greens also takes in many of the needs of wildlife. Most plans involve programmes to control invasive species such as Sea Buckthorn, regenerate Gorse and the cover it provides, along with the maintenance of a diverse habitat. The planting of protective zones of Marram grass not only strengthens the coastal defences of the course, but further provides for the needs of birds.

Additionally, many courses also work with both statutory and voluntary bodies such as Scottish Natural Heritage and the SOC to conduct survey work aimed at identifying potential action points. This can become particularly important for links courses before and after high prestige events such as The Open. Like most of what happens in our countryside today, the theme of 'management' becomes almost a necessity. Hackneyed though it might seem, the term 'stewardship of the countryside' is something equally appropriate to the wellbeing of golf courses.

The wide range of wildlife existing within links courses may first become apparent during the first quarter of the year. Much of Ayrshire's Grey Partridge population has declined significantly in farmland during the past 25 years, so it's always a real treat to see one or two coveys out feeding on stubble adjacent to the courses during the winter months. Turnberry has at least two pairs of this scarce gamebird breeding on the course. Gorse, Broom and the scattered trees (mostly native) provide valuable feeding areas for small passerines such as Coal Tit, Blue Tit and Goldcrest during this season. Although the courses play host to a wide range of wintering species, the coastal Marram zone is important too, with seed-eaters such as Reed Bunting, and occasionally Snow Bunting, making use of it.

Spring is the time of year when the links come alive though, and the important range of near impenetrable bushes play their part in this. Species such as Wren, Robin and Dunnock (or Hedge Accentor if you really prefer) all take advantage of the scrub cover, with Royal Troon currently supporting at least 30 pairs of the first species. This cover also proves extremely important for species such as Linnet which, until recently, appeared to be declining in many farming regions. Gorse and large patches of *Rosa rugosa* form havens for both this species and incoming migrant warblers such as Sedge Warbler and Whitethroat.

Sedge Warbler *(Lang Stewart)*

In the past two years Royal Troon has held as many as 20 pairs of Whitethroats. The coming years might yet prove to be more interesting, with singing Lesser Whitethroats having turned up at three links courses in recent Springs.

Large tracts of 'rough' might trouble some American golfers unused to such extensive areas of thick grass, but bird species such as Skylark and Meadow Pipit thrive on them. Once more, the former species has faced problems over much of the UK due to changing land use, but the rough on Royal Troon supports around 30 pairs, with Meadow Pipits topping 40 pairs. Clearly the care taken by management staff here, especially since The Open Championship, has helped maintain a very

healthy population of both these grassland species. Isolated clumps of trees such as Scots Pine, and small Hawthorn shrubs add further to the diversity of breeding birds on most links courses, with Carrion Crow, Woodpigeon and Stonechat occurring within them.

Many migrant species use the short grass of the fairways to 'top up' as they move through. Late March into May can provide you with wonderful mornings when the fairways and greens are full of Northern Wheatears or White Wagtails, quite apart from the sight of hordes of hirundines and pipits moving up the coast. Unusual species to occur, often in association with those migrants, include Merlin, Sparrowhawk - and even Hobby. During early May, it is quite possible for many species to enjoy at least 3 or 4 hours of undisturbed feeding before the first humans appear – usually the greens staff. This is the time of day when most courses seem to be bursting with life, and a good time to take stock of what is actually breeding or passing through.

As summer progresses, the variety of insect life on links courses also becomes a bit more obvious with common species of butterfly such as Small Heath, Common Blue, Meadow Brown and Peacock all appearing. Less common species like Dark Green Fritillary, Grayling or even a passing Clouded Yellow can sometimes brighten up a day when birds are starting to quieten down. Autumn migration is no less spectacular, with the coastal location of links courses offering views of passage geese, incoming Whooper Swans and, at Turnberry, the chance to indulge in a spot of seawatching (on days when even golfers complain about the weather!).

Stonechat *(Harry Scott)*

Where the links course includes small water features, the opportunity to add to the list of species increases and these spots can act like magnets to migrating passerines – the appearance of a Siberian Stonechat on Turnberry was at just such a location. Waterfowl such as Mallard, Teal and Tufted Duck use the small pools on Turnberry, often with passage Snipe for company around the margins. If the rodent population has hit a peak in its cycle, Short-eared Owls can turn up, seemingly oblivious to the activities of golfers.

Turnberry light *(Angus Hogg)*

Much of what happens on links courses is not the result of a happy accident. The variety of habitats and the security offered to birds is the result of carefully developed strategies to develop the assets of what is basically a rural landscape. The fact that 'environmental management' now features largely in most plans has come about because of the genuine interest shown by many golfers in the wildlife present. Many courses have now produced booklets and information packs for golfers which they can use before or during their round to add that extra interest to their day out. Most courses provide limited access to birders but, providing responsible use is made of rights of way and access points, the links can be rewarding places to carry out your pursuit in safety.

Although I might not have required too much convincing, having recently been involved in a bird survey of the Royal Troon course, it's become even more apparent to me that links courses (and doubtless inland ones too) are extremely important refuges for birds, especially some species suffering the effects of habitat loss. It might not have been quite so obvious to me 35 years ago, but any time a planning application for a links course crops up in Ayrshire, there really are few, if any, alternatives which can support and maintain such a diversity of wildlife in coastal areas. I probably won't see any eagles, and certainly no albatrosses, but the future for many Ayrshire birdies remains bright on the links.

Angus Hogg

Seminar personnel at Blacklaw Windfarm (Scottish Power)

Windfarms, birds and Scottish Power

David Fotheringham of Scottish Power sets out the company's approach to windfarm planning and construction and describes how land around wind turbines can be managed for birds. We welcome any further contributions to this debate (Eds).

Windfarms and their effects on birds continue to be a controversial issue, with negative examples of badly-sited turbines in Spain and US being used by critics to condemn windfarms in the UK. But Scottish Power, the UK's biggest onshore wind energy developer, has a positive story to tell. At a recent seminar, conservation groups were briefed on the company's best-practice approach to windfarm development and management, including positive conservation work and ongoing research that will directly benefit rare birds and their habitats.

Already 34 km^2 of land is being managed to promote biodiversity at Scottish Power's three key windfarms – at Black Law near Forth, Lanarkshire and at Beinn an Tuirc and Cruach Mhor in Argyll. The habitat management plans in Argyll, which go beyond mitigation for the effects of the windfarms, are helping some of Scotland's most impressive species, such as Golden Eagle, Hen Harrier and Black Grouse.

Black Law, Lanarkshire

Here, Scottish Power has launched the most ambitious landscape restoration and habitat creation project ever undertaken by a UK windfarm developer. Delegates from the RSPB, SNH, BTO and SWT toured the site – at 97 MW, the largest windfarm in the UK – and heard about the positive action at Black Law, where 1,440 hectares are being actively managed to create and improve conditions for birds and other wildlife.

Central to the habitat management plan has been Scottish Power's restoration of an abandoned 150-hectare opencast coal mine at Climpy. The hole in the ground, with a capacity of 1.5 million cubic metres, was a blight on the landscape and devoid of wildlife interest. The void has now been filled and Scottish Power ecologist David MacArthur explained: "The reinstatement techniques we've used will benefit wading birds. A clay cap over parts of the site will deliberately impede drainage while a peat and soil mix on the surface will result in ponds and wet grassland for feeding and nesting waders. In some respects we have started from a baseline of zero. Our target species – Lapwing, Snipe, Oystercatcher and Curlew – just weren't present in any numbers during our initial surveys. We expect to see an upward trend as the habitats take shape." Around 300 metres of the Abbey Burn, that used to run through the Climpy site, have also been reinstated to their original course and six metres on either side of the bank are being developed specifically for Water Voles and Otters.

Aerial view of Blacklaw site (Scottish Power)

Meanwhile, over 900 hectares of blanket bog and acid grassland are being managed for their biodiversity – including 400 hectares that had been dried out and degraded by non-native conifer plantations. The commercial forestry – more than a million trees – is now being removed and drains dammed to raise water levels. The gradual improvements will offer David and his colleagues a chance to study blanket bog restoration techniques that can be applied at other sites. David said the company also plans to enhance the diversity of deciduous woodland and scrub, improving the site's visual amenity, while sensitive planting could entice Black Grouse back to the area for the first time in 10 years.

On lower ground in the habitat management area, "sacrificial crops" – left unharvested to provide food for farmland birds – will optimise numbers and diversity while a nestbox programme will encourage breeding species. David told the conference: "Our habitat management plan at Black Law goes well beyond mere mitigation for the effects of the windfarm construction and operation. It is all positive conservation work and we hope to demonstrate at Black Law that our windfarm developments and the environment can go hand in hand."

The RSPB and SNH are both represented on the habitat management group and have offered encouragement and advice. Simon Zisman, the RSPB's Central Scotland conservation officer, said: "Black Law has taken a badly-scarred site and vastly improved it. The terrible damage done by opencast mining has been reversed. This will benefit a range of wildlife – notably breeding waders and farmland birds. It would be fantastic to see the level of commitment and resources invested in this project by Scottish Power continued throughout the rest of the industry."

The Argyll experience: Beinn an Tuirc

Habitat management work by Scottish Power is enabling Golden Eagles to co-exist successfully with its 46-turbine windfarm at Beinn an Tuirc in Kintyre. David MacArthur told the seminar that the presence of a pair of eagles was identified during the environmental assessment for the 30 MW windfarm. In response, mitigation was designed in at the planning stage, with the turbines re-sited outwith the birds' core territory.

Meanwhile 1,215 hectares of upland moor – including 450 hectares that have been cleared of commercial forestry – north of the windfarm are being managed to benefit the eagles' main prey species, Red Grouse. The aim is to reduce the risk of collision by encouraging the eagles to hunt at the mitigation area and away from the turbines. At the seminar, ornithologist Mike Madders, of Natural Research, gave his independent assessment of the success of Scottish Power's conservation measures. Mike explained the upland habitat had suffered long-term degradation for birds such as Golden Eagle and Hen Harrier due to the impact of sheep farming and mature commercial forestry.

His studies, that began in 1997 prior to the windfarm's construction and have so far included more than 1,000 hours' of observation, examined two key issues – any displacement of eagles caused by the turbines and the risk of collision. He reported: "There has been a substantial shift by the eagles into the habitat management area. They may simply be avoiding the windfarm, however the clearance of commercial forestry has enabled the birds to exploit habitat that

was previously not suitable for them. We cannot separate this out at this stage. What I can say is that the mitigation appears to have been successful for the eagles. If you take a windfarm of this scale and provide a habitat area that's suitable, it appears to reduce the likelihood there could be a collision involving a turbine. We had just one incident where an eagle flew over the windfarm and it appears to have been an anomaly – an immature bird rather than one of the territorial pair."

Cruach Mhor

On the Cowal peninsula, studies are continuing into Hen Harrier and Short-eared Owl interaction with the 35-turbine windfarm at Cruach Mhor windfarm. Here, 577 hectares are being managed following the clearance of 386 hectares of conifers to enhance existing areas of blanket bog and acid grassland. Although his study was incomplete, Mike believed there had been little or no displacement of harriers from the windfarm area. A pair nested at the site during the construction phase and, in summer 2005, a pair fledged four young successfully from a site within 300 metres of the nearest turbine.

"This is an interesting research opportunity," said Mike. "We are learning a lot from studies at Cruach Mhor that will be of great use in the debate about harriers and windfarms. Trees are still being felled, so the full effects of habitat management have not yet kicked in, but it appears the existing area is adequate for birds to rear young. It could be we will see an increase in the number of harriers using the new habitat once it is able to support them." Mike said his studies were continuing – especially into the potential risk posed to juveniles and displaying adult harriers – and he appealed to Scottish Power to ensure flexibility was built into their plan so that a response could be made should conditions change.

Habitat management groups, with representatives from the RSPB and SNH, are in place at both Argyll windfarms. Both sites have also been planted with areas of native woodland to improve conditions for Black Grouse. Scottish Power is also supporting the species in the wider community by sponsoring a project officer with the Black Grouse Recovery Project in Argyll and Bute.

View to Sound and Paps of Jura (Scottish Power)

The focus on responsible planning

Scottish Power is the largest owner of wind power in the UK, with 13 operational windfarms and a total capacity of 255 MW – enough energy to power 140,000 households. The company has proposals for a further 1,000 MW of wind power, including a 322 MW site at Whitelee Forest south of Glasgow which will be the largest windfarm in Europe. Its wind power programme represents a significant contribution towards UK climate change targets, with Black Law's 97 MW being enough to supply 54,000 homes and displace 170,000 tonnes of CO2 each year.

Head of Renewables Policy Alan Mortimer said Scottish Power's programme was being advanced in a responsible manner, with a site selection policy that embraced extensive environmental monitoring and exhaustive consultation with stakeholders, such as the RSPB, SNH and local people. In 2004, the renewables team published a policy document detailing its sustainable approach to windfarm development, following input from SNH, RSPB, WWF and Friends of the Earth Scotland. It states that Scottish Power will avoid sites that would have an unacceptable impact on landscape character and only pursue sites in areas with nature conservation designations if mitigation measures were likely to be acceptable. Indeed the company walked away from a proposed site at Tressady after two years of planning because it felt unable to mitigate sufficiently for the effect of the windfarm on birdlife, particularly birds of prey.

Crucially, site selection and planning are carried out by an in-house team with almost 20 years' experience in windfarm development. And, once developed, the windfarms are operated and managed by Scottish Power, ensuring high levels of environmental responsibility from start to finish. Alan stressed: "It is important to draw a distinction between Scottish Power, who intend to own a windfarm for the long term, and some companies out there who are simply looking to gain planning permission for a site before selling it on. Because of our long-term interest we apply particular rigour at the development stage to ensure our projects are sustainable in every sense of the word. We also recognise the potential for large windfarms in the right places to make a significant contribution towards renewable energy targets. We then incorporate environmental and community benefits into all of our developments wherever possible."

To date, the company has assessed more than 400 locations across Scotland but only one site in 10 passes the exhaustive screening process that examines the proposal's impact on environmental factors, including birds, wildlife, habitat and visual impact issues. And of those that pass the screening, less than half the sites progress to development following more detailed assessments based on the best possible environmental information.

Alan added: "Site selection is a core skill for Scottish Power and something we are proud of. In respect of birds, this means on-site monitoring for a sufficient period of time and to an appropriate standard before we decide whether to take the site forward for development. Our impact assessments are of a very high standard and we use experienced consultants."

Each of Scottish Power's 10 proposed windfarm sites has its own habitat management plan, with measures to benefit a range of raptors, Black Grouse and Capercaillie – plus Red Squirrel at Harestanes, a planned 200 MW site in Dumfriesshire. These mitigation areas would bring the total area managed for biodiversity at Scottish Power's windfarms to 57 km^2 – approaching the size of the city of Dundee (65km^2).

Bill Band, of SNH, said he was concerned at the effects on landscapes of a large number of windfarms being concentrated in one area. But he said: "Scottish Power's site selection process has been excellent – particularly its large windfarms at Black Law and Whitelee, which are sites we judge as having the lowest level of environmental sensitivity." Simon Zisman, the RSPB's Central Scotland Conservation Officer, added: "The challenge that windfarms present is uncertainty of risk. We know relatively little about the impacts on birds from windfarms and have to deal with that as best we can. We also have limited access to the data that is out there – developers often claim commercial interest to keep the information to themselves. Scottish Power's site selection process is very welcome. They have an excellent track record in using quality consultants and we appreciate the effort they and their consultants have made in sharing information."

Although Scottish Power's renewables focus is principally on onshore wind, its portfolio includes hydro-electric schemes at Galloway and Lanark. The company is also supporting trials of Ocean Power Delivery's 'Pelamis' wave power generator and has carried out scoping surveys for tidal power in Argyll.

David Fotheringham

NOTES & COMMENT

Pheasant catching and eating Coal Tit

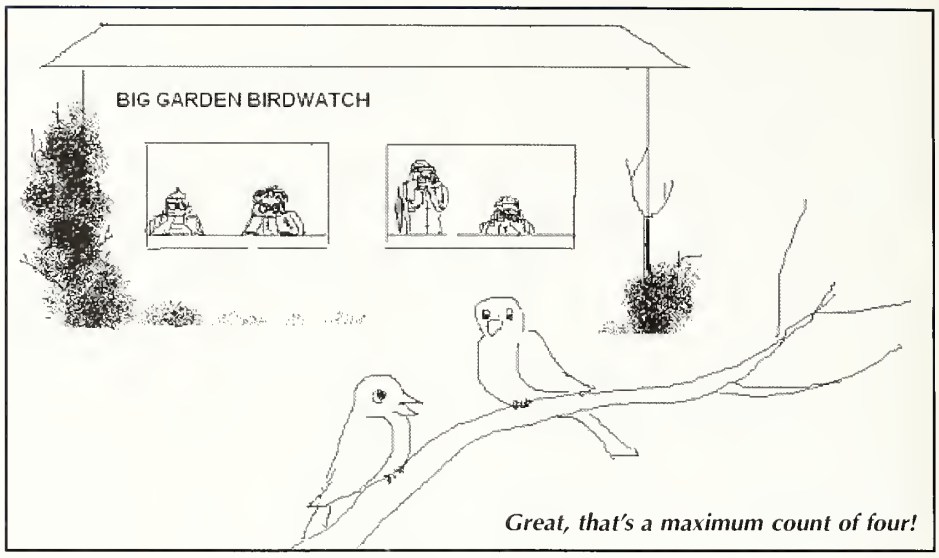
Can I suggest a possible explanation for Mike Fraser's apparently bizarre observation of an immature cock Pheasant catching, killing and eating a Coal Tit, as reported in *SBN* 78? This explanation assumes that this Pheasant was captive-reared, as is the case with the vast majority of these birds. Feather-pecking and cannibalism are a major problem in captive-reared flocks of Pheasants, just as they are in commercial flocks of that other member of the family *Phasianidae*, the laying hen (domestic fowl). Despite preventive measures that are taken routinely, as a former poultry scientist, I can confirm that injurious pecking can still sometimes lead to death and genuine cannibalism in both species. Such severe damage is usually caused by just a few individuals. Hence, in the case of Pheasants, it seems possible that, just occasionally, an individual that has developed a taste for eating flesh while in its rearing flock, might persist in this behaviour if the opportunity arises after it is released.

John Savory

A Crested Tit nesting in a tiny dead pine

Crested Tits usually construct their nest sites by first excavating a nest chamber in the soft rotten wood in a standing dead tree (known as a snag). In the ancient native pinewoods like Abernethy Forest, they select the largest snags, typically with a trunk diameter of about 45 cm. In such snags, they excavate the rotten sapwood between the bark and the central heartwood. The heartwood rots very slowly and remains hard because the cells of the wood are resinous when a tree dies. Given the limited amount of sapwood, the tits seek out the largest snags.

Nesthole in Pine *(Ron Summers)*



Great, that's a maximum count of four!

In pine plantations, there are fewer large snags because the trees are felled at the end of a stand rotation. The trees that do die during the life of a stand tend to be the smallest trees, which die due to competition from larger trees. Thus, the Crested Tits are forced to use what is available. Here, we describe a nest site that was found in spring 2005 in a mixed Scots Pine and Lodgepole Pine plantation at Newtyle Wood in Morayshire.

Kenny Kortland at site *(Ron Summers)*

The nest site was located by the tapping noise of the excavating bird. The Scots Pine snag was only 3.1 m high and had a trunk diameter of 11 cm at breast height. The nest was 40 cm from the top of the snag where the trunk diameter was probably only about 5 cm. The nest entrance faced west where a branch had broken away from the trunk. The snag was in an unthinned, dense stand, with a surrounding density of 2200 live pines per hectare. However, the nest was within 5 m of a ride. The surrounding trees probably sheltered the snag from stormy weather, which may otherwise have toppled the snag.

Forestry Commission Scotland is aware of the biodiversity value of deadwood in their plantations, and is now creating high stumps, which, in time, may be suitable for nesting Crested Tits. It was notable that there were several freshly created high stumps in a clear-felled area close to the nest. This should ensure that there will be suitable nest sites for Crested Tits in the future.

Kenny Kortland & Ron Summers

"The Ladies" and the Isle of May Bird Observatory.

In an otherwise splendid obituary of Donald Watson in the "Independent" on 29 November Des Thompson writes "In 1934... W.B. Alexander gave a brilliant lecture at Oxford on the Heligoland Bird Observatory. This stimulated Watson into helping plan and build the Heligoland Trap... on the Isle of May off the Fife coast. A year earlier he had made his first visit there, where he met Dr Evelyn Baxter and Miss Leonora Rintoul" (otherwise known as The Ladies)...

Since this wasn't quite what I remembered about the foundation of the Isle of May Bird Observatory, I consulted Joe Eggeling's *The Isle of May* (Oliver & Boyd, 1960: 118-20), where he reproduces a report by H.F.D. Elder, its first Secretary: "About this time (1933) an article by W.B. Alexander appeared in *British Birds* describing the bird observatory on Heligoland, and R.M. Lockley was writing in *The Countryman* about his bird trap on Skokholm. We knew W.B. He had helped us already in many ways... and promised to assist us in any way he could. Soon afterwards he visited Edinburgh to talk to the Royal Physical Society about Heligoland, and he ended his lecture by explaining what we had in mind. The reaction of the meeting was most encouraging..."

Actually there was a bit more to this story than is recorded there. I had a great respect for Wilfrid Alexander, who was the first really senior ornithologist to be nice to me, and after he retired I visited him in Swanage to debrief him about the history of British ornithology. He had not much respect for the Skokholm "observatory", which he regarded as a pretentious labour-camp, and much more for that on the Isle of May. He reported that in Edinburgh that Svengali (or Diaghilev?) of mid-century Scottish ornithology, George Waterston, took him aside, said he foresaw one problem, territorial behaviour by The Ladies, who considered that they had inherited the Isle of May from John Harvie-Brown, and asked if W.B. could help here.

So W.B. put on his best bib and tucker, paid a courtesy call on The Ladies, and repeated his lecture to them. After expressing great respect for their work on the Isle of May he then suggested they set up a Heligoland Trap there. When they began to make excuses, he then suggested that if they played their cards right they might be able to persuade the young folk to do it, and eventually offered to go and put the case to them. The rest is better-known history.

W.R.P.Bourne

Hooded Crow dropping Winkle

I spotted this enterprising Hooded Crow at a jetty in Stornoway trying to break a winkle by flying up and dropping the mollusc on to a small concrete pier from about 20 feet. The crow then landed, inspected the shell carefully, stabbed at it, threw it about a bit, had another look, then repeated the process. Finally it extracted what I suspect was a dead, or at the very least, stunned winkle. Four other Hoodies in the area have learnt the same trick.

Frank Stark

Teal *(Stewart Love)*

White Stork *(Eric McCabe)*

Caption Competition

Provide a caption for the White Stork pictured above and have a chance of winning an SOC hat. Each *SBN* edition will feature a new photo. The winner and other best captions will be shown in *SBN* 80. Send your single caption by E-mail to: jimmy.maxwell@virgin.net (or of course by mail to the SOC – see Page 3)

The winning Caption from *SBN* 78 (see Teal photo above) came from John Reid with "On reflection, I really am a handsome fellow!"– Well done! Others – "I'll show that Antipodean who's boss around here!" – Margaret Dunn. " So who's this Harry Worth fella?" – Nick Carter

Aquatic Sparrowhawk

On the 16th January I was heading up Craigmill Den, east of Carnoustie, and met a birding friend who was accompanied by an Australian visitor. Within a few minutes of watching Treecreepers, Goldcrest and Bullfinch, the Australian visitor called out "Sparrowhawk!" A female had hit a Blackbird with such force that both birds tumbled down the river bank and into the fast flowing water. The Blackbird was submerged under the Sparrowhawk which was being carried down the stream on the surface of the water with its wings outstretched.

Eventually, the Sparrowhawk managed to lodge itself under a small projecting overhang and, with amazing tenacity, began to pull itself and its prey up on to a small ledge. It lay there for some time before manoeuvring another few inches up the bank with its prey still locked in its talons. There was another long pause before it began the plucking process; its prey was long since dead either by drowning or crushed by the talons which were still locked on.

The three if us were amazed by the strength of the Sparrowhawk and its ability to overcome seemingly impossible odds to live another day.

Dan Carmichael

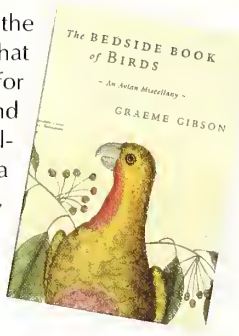
Hooded Crow dropping winkle *(Frank Stark)*

BOOK REVIEWS

The Bedside Book of Birds, Graeme Gibson, 2005. Bloomsbury, London, 370pp, ISBN 0-7475-7812-5, £20.

Compiled by a Canadian author, and subtitled 'An Avian Miscellany', this book is what it says it is, a collection of short stories, legends, poems and folk tales about birds. Naturalists such as W.H. Hudson and classical authors such as Shakespeare are represented, while paintings by Audubon and Gould are featured.

My interest in the book peaked very early on, and subsequently I found it rather a tedious read. The images are good, however, and are drawn from many sources ranging from cave art to modern sketches.



Although the publishers claim that it is a perfect gift for birdwatchers and literary ornithologists, it is not a book I would buy, but may be suitable as a light-hearted gift to a birding friend or relative.

Norman Elkins

From Dawn till Dusk by Darren Woodhead 2005 156pp ISBN 1-904078-19-2 Langford Press £35 Available from SOC Bookshop at Waterston House, Aberlady or Langford Press.

Darren Woodhead is a young Yorkshireman who is a very accomplished wildlife artist, as well as a knowledgeable field naturalist (see *SBN* 73, Sept. 2004)

John Busby's introduction sets the scene in his foreword and he acknowledges Darren's expert handling of the watercolour medium "with the skill of an Oriental Master".

Darren begins the book with an engaging passage about his birdwatching expeditions in the Dales with his grandfather in a Reliant (Robin?) three-wheeler, which clearly set him on a wildlife path. Darren describes the many influences that have shaped his approach to drawing and painting, acknowledging Tunnicliffe, Busby, Ennion, Lars Jonsson etc, plus his tutors at Art College in Wales and the RCA, where he studied for a Masters.

The book is organised around the four seasons and is profusely illustrated with his watercolours and delightful line drawings. He manages to capture both the time of day and season of year as well as the activities of the birds - all this with an engaging commentary that always adds interest and information for the reader.

Darren paints directly from nature and the freshness of the images catches your interest. Not only that, his control of light, pattern, textures, composition and the rare ability to portray natural behaviour of his wildlife subjects puts him in a privileged position amongst his contemporaries.

Publisher Ian Langford is to be congratulated on such a fine production, along with Nye Hughes (also a participant in the same D&P Course!) of Dalrymple Design, who designed the layout and typography. We all look forward to seeing many more books from Darren and the Langford Press.

Bill Gardner

Birds New to Britain 1980-2004 Adrian Pitches and Tim Cleeves, 2005 T & A D Poyser, London. 344pp.ISBN 0-7136-6692-7 Hardback £35.00

Before even opening this book, the picture of a Black Lark on the front cover is enough to set the pulses racing and one can only imagine what it must be like to actually be the birder who finds a 'First for Britain'.

The book is a compilation of finders' accounts for 76 birds new to Britain and follows on from Birds New to Britain and Ireland by Tim Shanock and Pete Grant which covered the period 1946-1980. As Eric Meek (Chairman of the BOURC) states in his foreword "This book is about dreams... it is a book about dreams come true!"

The book is presented chronologically and each year starts with a general review of the birding highlights. This is then followed by a personal account of that year by guest authors. Malcolm Roxby's twitching accounts of 2001, including two attempts to land on North Ronaldsay to see Siberian Blue Robin, left me exhausted! Browsing through (which is most likely how this book will be used), I came across 1988 and remembered as Adrian Pitches describes it ..."and domestic ructions in many households when a first winter male American Robin was found at Inverbervie, Aberdeenshire on Christmas Eve." It wasn't a first for Britain but when Martyn Scott 'phoned me in Aberdeen as I was peeling the brussel sprouts on Christmas morning, I almost sliced my finger off!

Most active birders have 'special' years that may or may not involve seeing rarities, and the accounts of these authors make fascinating reading. Ken Shaw's account of 2003 describes one of his favourite all-round birdwatching years which was largely based in Scotland.

Scotland is, of course, well represented in this book, with 19 of the 'Firsts' being found here. 1985 was a "Shetland year" with the first Cedar Waxwing, Chestnut-sided Warbler and Brown Shrike, supplemented by a Blue Rock Thrush in Strathclyde and a Wilson's Warbler in Cornwall.

In 2004, however, Scotland 'cleaned up' on 'Firsts'. The Purple Martin on the Outer Hebrides was followed by Chestnut-eared Bunting and Rufous-tailed Robin on Fair Isle in October and the eminently viewable Masked Shrike in Fife. The acceptance of Sykes's Warbler that had been trapped on Fair Isle in 1959, completed the picture.

As one moves through the accounts of the years, the incredible increase in birding knowledge, taxonomy, publications and expertise is evident. Add to this the communications explosion with pagers, grapevines, CDs for identification etc. and it is small wonder that 'Firsts' keep being discovered. 1993 and 2002 were the only years in which no 'First' was discovered and only six of the years had a single 'First'.

The book is richly illustrated with a selection of line drawings and twenty-four colour plates in the middle. You do not need to be a hardened 'twitcher' to enjoy it, and anyone who experiences a thrill at finding a personal 'first', a 'first' for the 'patch' or, better still, for the country, can easily relate to the excitement which permeates these finders' accounts.

Overall, a well-constructed and readable book and any serious birder will enjoy looking back over twenty-five years and recalling birds they saw and those they missed! What is heartening to read in many of the accounts, is the tremendous attention to detail which many of the

finders' demonstrate in the descriptions they give. Nowadays, many twitchers are known to merely go and 'tick the box'! So many of the species accounts (especially the easily confused species, or races) show that the finders were generally well versed in their subject but also had the determination and patience to make detailed and critical notes to clinch the identification. Most accounts amply prove that they deserved their prize!

Andy Thorpe

The Crow Chronicles - The Mob by Clem Martini (Bloomsbury 2004)

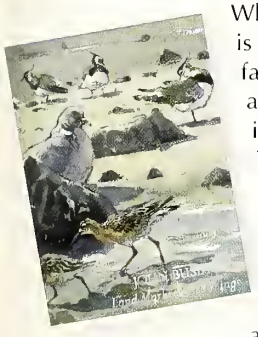
The notes on the dust jacket compare Clem Martini's children's book to "Watership Down", but it is far less sentimental. He explores the dilemmas of our lives from politics and religion to leadership and loyalty, danger and rebellion through the lives of the Crows.

There are occasional glimpses of "Animal Farm" and "The Birds". The Crow's observations of humans, sometimes obsessive, and their attempts to analyse human behaviour are wryly amusing...

With its dark themes and suspense, this book should provide a good read for a stormy winter evening.

Jean Torrance

Land Marks & Sea Wings John Busby Published by Wildlife Art Gallery, Lavenham, Suffolk. 160pp ISBN 0952623692 £45



What a lovely book! It is a joy to handle, fascinating to read and contains truly interesting pictures. This is a book you really must try to keep out of the bookcase so that you can look again and again at the huge range of paintings. They reflect John's life from his early years when his passion for landscapes was formed and developed. Art College in Edinburgh was the start of his love of Scotland by which time his pictures of birds and wildlife were expanded in line with the increasing demand for his work.

There are chapters – beautifully illustrated – on the Western and Northern Isles, Aberlady Bay, St Abbs, Bass Rock and Tyninghame estuary. From the last place, he has included a number of paintings showing his deep interest in rock pools and how the colours and light change with the tides. Travel always fascinated him and faraway places gave him fresh fields to explore and the chance develop his techniques. Places such as Hawaii, Falklands & Galapagos Islands, Crete and so on add greatly to the enjoyment of this book. But it is not just the paintings but the writings which reflect John's personality as well as giving the background and thinking behind much of his work. You will not be disappointed when you buy this book.

Frank Hamilton

Conservation Science in the RSPB 2005. Direct from Alix Middleton, RSPB, 25 Ravelston Terrace, Edinburgh EH4 3TP. 74pp £2.50

This excellent, easily-read booklet covers a wide range of subjects. There are two or three page summaries of work on the monitoring of species such as Corncrake, Capercaillie, etc but including Spotted Eagles in Belarus. The next section deals with threatened species ecology including Reed Bunting, Tree Sparrow, albatrosses, vultures, etc. Lastly, some fascinating work on subjects as diverse as bird communities in oil palm and rubber plantations, cats and collars, use of fire for pine regeneration and so on.

All the subjects are superb examples of concise, readable writing, illustrated throughout and with lists of publications if you want more information. My view is that all birdwatchers should read this. (This publication is available in the SOC Library)

Frank Hamilton

Pelicans, Cormorants and their Relatives: the Pelicaniformes J. Bryan Nelson, illustrated by John Busby, Andrew Mackay and Bas Teunis, Oxford University Press 2006, ISBN 0-19-857727-3, 661 pages, £95.

As the 17th volume in OUP's series on "Bird Families of the World", this is in every sense a global book about the breeding biology of pelicans, cormorants/shags, darters, gannets/boobies, frigate birds and tropic birds.

Well-known for his fieldwork on the Bass Rock and the Gannets, and on the Galapagos, Ascension Island and the Boobies, Bryan Nelson has put his local and worldwide experience into writing this weighty handbook.

Half of the book goes generally into family and then deeply into species accounts. The other half goes widely into discussing key issues facing the Pelicaniformes and their researchers (including use and potential of modern techniques such as DNA analysis and remote sensing).

The issues discussed are: taxonomic relationships; behaviour; breeding ecology; and the impact of humans. The last topic is alarming - drainage or degradation of wetlands, persistent pollution, discarded plastics and lines or nets, and enormous loss of marine food resources are all serious threats to the Pelicaniformes. Most salutary for watchers or researchers is the evidence about the disruptions caused to seabird colonies by human disturbance, especially with the rise in eco tourism.

On the brighter side, as Nelson outlines, efforts are afoot to compile adequate species databases, to model population trends and interactions with fisheries, and to improve cooperation between seabird biologists and between their discipline and others. There is also a need to raise public awareness and to promote international marine reserves.

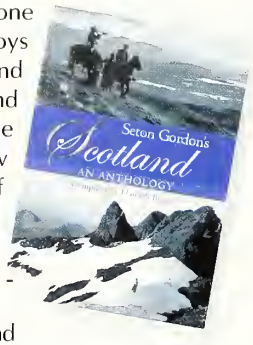
From the broad and fluent discussion of such issues, the book narrows into the species accounts, which are reference entries packed with details, well complemented by maps and diagrams, and particularly valuable in the way they lead in to a comprehensive listing of the literature. For instance, the list cites a great deal of Scottish research by Bob Furness and by Sarah Wanless, as well as R.W.J. (Bob) Smith's survey of Scottish Cormorant colonies (*Scottish Birds* 1969). Indeed, I even found myself guided to the literature on a distant aspect that interests me, namely 'the Cormorant problem' on Switzerland's lakes and rivers.

For the fieldworker, the species accounts are backed up by an appendix of measurements of each species.

The actual birds really come to life in John Busby's 12 pages of masterly and characterful drawings of territorial and pair behaviour. Andrew Mackay's identification colour plates are clear, concise, but rather emblematic and flat.

Peter Holt

Seton Gordon's Scotland: an Anthology. Compiled by Hamish Brown, 2005. Whittles Publishing Limited, Caithness, 329 pp, ISBN 1-904445-22-5, £25.



If, like me, you are one of those who enjoys reading books by and books about the grand old naturalists of the past, then this new anthology of writings by Seton Paul Gordon (1886-1977), compiled by the mountain walker and writer Hamish Brown, should appeal to you. Recently, Gordon was the subject of a feature article in SBN 76, written by his friend Arthur Ferguson. Included in that article was a short letter from him dated May 28 1965, which, in just a few sentences, transports the reader to share his experience while watching a Golden Eagle eyrie in Skye. This is typical of many of the selected extracts in this evocative anthology. Not only does it remind us of Gordon's remarkable life and achievements, but it also serves as a taster for his wide range of mostly out-of-print books which can now be obtained readily through the internet. I had previously found his "The Golden Eagle, King of Birds" (1955, republished 1980) to be a fascinating and comprehensive account of that species, typical of an era when knowledge was based on field observation and anecdote rather than on systematic data gathering and analysis.

But the invariably kilted Seton Gordon was much more than just a dedicated field naturalist. Raised on Deeside, he graduated with honours in biology at Oxford, came to know the Hebrides while a naval patrol officer in the 1914-18 war, and spent 50 years living in Skye. He began taking photographs of birds and writing articles for publication in his teens, and produced his first book "Birds of the Loch and Mountain" in 1907. After his death, Adam Watson wrote in Scottish Birds (1977, 9(6)) that his early books "brimmed with enthusiasm and already showed his wide interest in birds, rare plants, snow beds, regeneration of the old Caledonian forest, piping, weather, folk lore, history, place names, the survival of Gaelic and a deep appreciation and knowledge of the Highlands". He was well travelled and his output was prolific. As well as his many other publications, he was sole author of 27 books from 1907 to 1971, about a third of which were concerned mainly with birds. A final letter of his about Whooper Swans was published in "The Field" only days before his death. His influence on younger writers like Desmond Nethersole-Thompson, Adam Watson and Tom Weir was profound.

After a Foreword by Hamish Brown and Preface by Adam Watson, this anthology consists of 121 extracts selected from most of Seton Gordon's books and a few of his other writings, grouped according to subject under 14 headings. These are: The Cairngorms; The Length of the Land; The Outer Hebrides; Ways That Are Gone; Birds Above All; Hill Days; Western Isles; The Unrestful Past; Wildlife Notes; Islands of the Edge; Stories to Tell; The Isle of Skye; Bird Notes; A Vanished World. Gordon's great skill as a writer was his ability to convey such a vivid sense of presence when describing journeys, events, scenery and weather that the reader can imagine being there with him. Generally his easily flowing prose is a pleasure to read, but just occasionally he wrote in an embellished style that some will find poetic and others overdone. I liked his frequent translations of Gaelic place names and quotations, and I found three of his alternative names for Scottish birds that are not listed in Jackson's and Mitchell's "A Guide to Scots Bird Names" (1996)!

Birds are referred to frequently throughout this book, although only two sections deal with them specifically. There are numerous interesting anecdotes of unusual types of bird and mammal behaviour. Evidence, for example, of red deer eating carrion; a fox carrying a lamb on its back; a Heron eating a Blackbird; a young Ptarmigan swimming in a lochan; and a Golden Eagle killed in flight by a stoat it had caught. Seton Gordon's bagpipe playing attracted seals and red deer, and he reproduced a Greenshank's song on his chanter. On one occasion he even cooled a panting Dotterel by placing a large snowball next to it! My particular favourites are his description of the piratical behaviour of Bonxies seen at Noss and Hermaness in Shetland, a flight from Skye across St Kilda to Rockall to count Guillemots in 1944 and amusing accounts of disruption caused by that "terrible pest" – the Highland midge. At the end of the 1914-18 war, a stalker friend found a "bomb" near Derry Lodge that was later identified as a flare dropped by a German Zeppelin in 1916. Gordon's day-to-day pocket diary entries for 1945 are included at the end of the book and they illustrate just how active he still was in his sixtieth year in maintaining his travels and wide range of interests, in spite of wartime restrictions.

The book is well illustrated with black and white photographs taken of and by Seton Gordon, though the placing of these is sometimes obscure. Also, a map of Scotland would have been useful to show places referred to in the extracts. These are minor quibbles, however, and we should thank Hamish Brown for producing this historic collection to treasure. I recommend it.

John Savory

RSPB Children's Guide to Bird watching, David Chandler & Mike Unwin, 2005. A & C Black, London, 128pp, ISBN 0-7136-7157-2, £9.99.

This small book, with a tough waterproof cover, is packed with advice on every aspect of the art of birdwatching. Aimed at 8-12 year olds, it would also be a mine of information for adults new to the hobby. The book includes tips on identification, mainly in a succinct mini field guide of 70 pages, in which the illustrations are mostly excellent, coming as they do from several well-known artists. My main criticism is that a few are over-coloured, especially an orangey Dunnock, reddish-winged Long-tailed Tit and a Sedge Warbler with an enormous supercilium. These are minor quibbles though and the rest of the book has good advice on equipment, habitats, notebooks, recording and how to actually watch birds.

A nice touch is the section on binoculars and how to use them - some adults would find this useful! For the more serious youngster, there are suggestions on where to go next e.g. websites, surveys and travel. A really good idea is the highlighted (in red) advice on personal safety, such as walking near banks, on mud and in remote spots, and the necessary accompaniment of adults. A section on the birding year is geared towards the school holidays. There is a glossary at the end, a map of RSPB reserves inside the front cover and a checklist inside the back cover. This must be one of the best children's bird books I have seen and I would even say that it is a must for every school classroom and home bookcase. An ideal gift, but the price would also be affordable to most keen youngsters. Get out there and buy this for your budding Bill Oddie today!

Norman Elkins

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RECENT REPORTS

A review of winter 2005-06

Brünnich's Guillemot, Shetland *(www.hughharrop.com)*

A comparatively disappointing winter for rarities, the highlight was undoubtedly the **Brunnich's Guillemot** on Shetland that commuted between Lerwick harbour and Bressay on 30th Nov-15th Dec at least - the first live bird in British waters since 1997 and the first truly twitchable individual since 1989, both those previous two having also been on Shetland. Although the bird appeared healthy enough, it did show very well, often close in off the main harbour area at Lerwick or off the pier on Bressay. Very low numbers of **Little Auks** were seen in the period, e.g. only 10 were reported in the whole of Jan, all from Orkney and Shetland. In contrast there were some late dates for other seabirds and good numbers of **Pomarine Skuas** seen, with 33 reported in Nov including at least 9 seen from a boat survey between Whalsay and Sullom (Shetland) on 18th, three off Lossiemouth (Moray) on 26th and 3 past Kinghorn harbour (Fife) on 27th. Up to 12 Pomarine Skuas were then reported in Dec, mostly from North-East Scotland and Shetland and apparent over-wintering occurred in both these areas with up to four juveniles continuing to be seen on Shetland in Jan and Feb. In Dec a **Long-tailed Skua** and a **Sooty Shearwater** were reported off Mains of Usan (Angus) on 3rd with an even later Sooty seen off Catterline (North-East Scotland) on 27th and single **Grey Phalaropes** were seen in Dec on Orkney and in Lothian.

It was a comparatively poor winter for white-winged gulls with around 20 **Iceland Gulls** and 20 **Glaucous Gulls** reported in Dec and at least 37 of each species seen in Jan with numbers remaining low into Feb. The peak count of Iceland Gulls was again at Stornoway harbour, Lewis (Outer Hebrides), with seven seen on 14th Jan though five were at Thurso (Caithness) on 7th Feb, whilst five Glaucous Gulls were at Peterhead (North-East Scotland) on 23rd Jan. Amongst Iceland Gulls, an ad was back at Ayr (Ayrshire) for its fifteenth winter though it was still upstaged by the ad **Ring-billed Gull** on Orkney, back at Stromness for its eighteenth winter. Up to six different Ring-billed Gulls were reported from Argyll in the period, including two, an ad and 2nd-winter, at Oban whilst an ad Ring-billed Gull at Lunan bay on the 5th-6th Jan is only the second record for Angus. This bird was found by observers looking for an ad **Bonaparte's Gull** that was seen between Montrose and Lunan Bay on 3rd Jan-2nd Feb. It proved very elusive, only being seen on three occasions (third county record). Up to four adult **Yellow-legged Gulls** were reported in the Clyde area with the only other one being an ad at Peterhead (North-East Scotland) from 14th Dec. Following on from the six **Laughing Gulls** seen in Nov (and covered in the last *SBN* report), another three birds were found in Dec and Jan - an ad at Ayr (Ayrshire) briefly on 19th Dec, an ad at Campbeltown (Argyll) from the 11th Jan at least and an ad at Ardrossan (Ayrshire) from the 24th Jan (3rd-4th Ayrshire records). These records are part of the UK-wide influx of 60+ birds from the 2nd Nov onwards.

Two **Snowy Owls** were again on the Outer Hebrides, being seen on and off on North Uist and Lewis. Another was reported near Kinlochewe (Highland) on 12th Dec. Four **Little Egrets** were seen, at Loch Leven (Perth & Kinross) still, in Dumfries & Galloway and more unusually on Orkney and Skye (Highland). Also on Skye a **Bittern** was picked up exhausted near Uig on 5th Jan, it was taken into care and released at the RSPB Loch of Strathbeg reserve (North-East Scotland) on 10th, with a second bird also on site there during the month and another reported at Seafield Pond (Lothian) on 18th Jan. Six **Rough-legged Buzzards** were reported from Shetland (2), Orkney, Outer Hebrides, Lothian and Lanarkshire though only two, on Fetlar (Shetland) in Nov and Mainland Orkney in Jan/Feb lingered for any length of time. Also on Shetland, two **White-billed Divers** were seen (in South Nesting and Mousa Sound) with one reported off Flotta (Orkney) on 29th Jan. Amongst waders, a very late juv **American Golden Plover** at Ness, Lewis (Outer Hebrides) may have been the bird first seen there in Sept, whilst a 1st-winter **Temminck's Stint** on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 28th Jan-6th Feb at least is unsurprisingly the first winter record for Scotland. An over-wintering **Spotted Redshank** was again at Newshot Island (Renfrewshire), a **Little Stint** was seen at Outhead (Fife) on 21st Jan and single **Whimbrels** were again spending their winter at Stevenston Point (Ayrshire) and Dunglass (Borders).

Lewis (Outer Hebrides) is proving itself to be the rare wildfowl capital of Scotland as five species, all of North American origin, were seen there this winter. Leading the way was a drake **Redhead** at Brue on 14th Jan with remarkably another reported, a female, on Tiree (Argyll) from the 14th Dec onwards (2nd-3rd Scottish records). Back on Lewis, a drake **Ring-necked Duck**, drake **Green-winged Teal** and drake **American Wigeon** were all seen, all presumed returning

Lesser Scaup, Caerlaverock *(Tristan Reid)*

birds, and a 1st-winter female **Lesser Scaup** was at Loch Barvas/Arnol on 11th-20th Dec. Another female was seen in Dec at Loch Leathan (Argyll) on 18th whilst a drake was at Kilbirnie Loch and on the nearby Barr Loch (Ayrshire/Renfrewshire) from the 27th Nov and a popular bird was at WWT Caerlaverock (Dumfries & Galloway) from the 16th Jan. Away from Lewis, further drake Ring-necked Ducks were reported in North-East Scotland and Caithness, drake American Wigeons were at Wick (Caithness) again and at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (North-East Scotland), at least 10 further drake Green-winged Teals were seen.

Three different **King Eiders** were on Shetland in the period, the only one seen elsewhere was a drake at Peterhead (North-East Scotland) from 11th Dec. Up to 12 **Surf Scoters** were seen in North-East Scotland, Orkney, Moray & Nairn, Fife and Lothian with Burghead Bay (Moray & Nairn) proving to be the best site with up to six seen there in both Nov and Dec. Around 25 **Smews** were reported, including a count of five birds including four drakes at Loch Leven (Perth & Kinross) on 8th Jan. The Central Scotland **Taiga Bean Goose** flock numbered at least 275 birds this winter, with six seen at Loch Connell (D&G) on 24th Dec and singles reported on Orkney in Dec and Angus in Jan. Up to two different **Tundra Bean Geese** were on Mainland Orkney in the period, whilst two birds proved popular between Skateraw and Torness (Lothian) from the 12th. Only one **Snow Goose** was reported, a white morph, in North-East Scotland at the end of Nov, then at Montrose Basin (Angus) on 7th Dec and the Eden Estuary (Fife) on 8th Dec-22nd Jan at least. Good numbers of presumed vagrant **Canada Geese** were reported, including up to seven on Islay (Argyll) and two birds amongst the Solway **Barnacle Geese** (Dumfries & Galloway) – one of the type *hutchinsii* and one of the type *taverneri* (both now of course part of a separate species, Lesser Canada Goose). A **Bewick's Swan** was reported at Vane Farm RSPB on 4th Feb – the only report received from anywhere in Scotland this winter.

Taiga Bean Goose, Central *(Stuart Green)*

It was another **Waxwing** winter, even if the numbers seen were not as spectacular as last winter. 350+ were reported in Nov including a flock of 199 birds in Aberdeen on 18th, up to 800 were noted in Dec with a peak count of 178 in Edinburgh on 11th and 500+ were still around in Jan with most again around Aberdeen and Edinburgh including a flock of 140 in Aberdeen on 26th and a flock of 104 in Edinburgh the same day. By the end of the month though, numbers had increased in the west of Scotland with a flock of 101 birds in Glasgow on the 31st. Four **Northern Bullfinches** were reported from Shetland in Dec with three birds seen in Orkney in Jan and then three in Lerwick (Shetland) on 2nd Feb. Also on Shetland, up to four **Black-bellied Dippers** were reported in the period including a Norwegian ringed bird at Voe. The only **Shore Lark** was between Barns Ness and Skateraw (Lothian) on 10th Dec and, despite good numbers being seen in the autumn, only five **Lapland Buntings** were reported in Dec (on Fair Isle, Tiree and Islay) and four in Jan, all from Lothian. **Hawfinches** were seen at Scone Palace (Perth & Kinross) throughout with a peak count of 60 birds there on 31st Jan. It was a poor winter for **Great Grey Shrike** with only four reports: two in the Clyde area and singles in Borders and Perth & Kinross. Four **Water Pipits** were seen from Dec at Hunterston Sands (Ayrshire), Kinneil (Upper Forth) and two on Islay – potentially the first records for Argyll. An **Arctic Redpoll** at Aberlady Bay (Lothian) from the 19th Dec onwards was probably the most "well twitched" rarity of the period. The bird, a classic 1st-winter of the form *exilipes*, associated with a small group of Mealy and Lesser Redpolls on the saltmarsh there and is the first twitchable mainland Scotland individual since the influx of winter 1995/96.

Angus Murray

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Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year in March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editors at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

The Club now has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all, the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications and an annual conference, and houses the Waterston Library, the most comprehensive library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of branches, which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, organise field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the 'official' Scottish List on behalf of the Club. The Club supports research and survey work through its Research Grants.

The Club maintains a regularly-updated web site, which not only contains much information about the Club, but is also the key source of information about birds and birdwatching in Scotland.

www.the-soc.org.uk

Passwords to access members' web pages on the new SOC web site: 'reed' & 'bunting'